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TWENTY FOUR

SERMONS,

ON

VARIOUS USEFUL SUBJECTS.

BY THE REVEREND

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LATE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN *BRIMFIELD*.

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CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

Thankfulneſs for Exiſtence.

PSALM CXXXIII. 14. *I will praiſe thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.* 7

SERMON II.

The ſame Subject continued. 19

SERMON III.

The Moral State of the World.

1 JOHN, V. 19. *And the whole world lieth in wickedneſs.* 33

SERMON IV.

The ſame Subject continued. 45

SERMON V.

Conformity to God the Eſſence of true Religion.

MATT. V. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* 57

SERMON VI.

The ſame Subject continued. 70

SERMON

SERMON VII.

The Benefit and Delight of drawing near to God.

PSALM lxxiii. 28. *But it is good for me to draw near to God.* 84

SERMON VIII.

The same Subject continued. 99

SERMON IX.

The restless Soul resting in God.

PSALM cxvi. 7. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul.* 112

SERMON X.

The same Subject continued. 124

SERMON XI.

The Friend of God.

JAMES, ii. 23. *And he was called the friend of God.* 137

SERMON XII.

The same Subject continued. 149

SERMON XIII.

Self Knowledge, or Acquaintance with our own Hearts.

PSALM iv. 4. *Commune with your own heart.* 164

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

Joy for the Happiness of Others.

LUKE, VX. 9. *And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.* 177

SERMON XV.

The Hypocrite.

JOB, XXXVI. 13. *But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath.* 191

SERMON XVI.

The same Subject continued. 205

SERMON XVII.

The unchanging Goodness and Mercy of God an everlasting Source of Gratitude and Praise.

PSALM CXXXVI. 1. *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever.* 217

SERMON XVIII.

The Gospel Method of instituting and ordering Churches.

TITUS, i. 5. *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.* 232.

SERMON

SERMON XIX.

Times of Refreſhment.

ACTS, iii. 19. *Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out, when the times of refreſhing ſhall come, from the preſence of the Lord.* 251

SERMON XX.

The ſame Subject continued. 264

SERMON XXI.

Fidelity in Preaching Deſirable.

1 SAM. iii. 17. *And he ſaid, What is the thing that the Lord hath ſaid unto thee? I pray thee, hide it not from me: God do ſo to thee, and more alſo, if thou hide any thing from me, of all the things that he ſaid unto thee.* 278

SERMON XXII.

The ſame Subject continued. 292

SERMON XXIII.

Truth Painful to a Wicked Heart.

ACTS, ii. 37. *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in the heart, and ſaid unto Peter, and to the reſt of the apoſtles, Men and brethren, what ſhall we do.* 307

SERMON XXIV.

The ſame Subject continued. 322

SERMON

SERMON I.

Thankfulneſs for Exiſtence.

PSALM cxxxix. 14.

I will praiſe thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

THE firſt idea, which occurs to mind on reading theſe words, is, that the pſalmiſt feels diſpoſed to bleſs God for his exiſtence; not only that he has *an exiſtence*, but that he has *ſuch an exiſtence*. "I will praiſe thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." He was meditating upon the myſterious and wonderful formation of his body in the womb, how curiouſly every part was formed, according to the all perfect pattern in the divine book. And to the attentive and philoſophic mind, the formation of the human body appears to be a work of ſurpriſing power and wiſdom, far ſurpaſſing the reach of our comprehenſion. But the ſame

may

may be ſaid, reſpecting the formation of the body of a beaſt, or inſect; and therefore the power and wiſdom of the Deity is no leſs manifeſt in the formation of the body of an animal, than in that of a man. But there is ſomething in man, which is wanting in every other ſpecies of creatures on earth, that is, a rational and immortal ſoul. By this, we are made capable of contemplating ourſelves, of knowing our own exiſtence, and of knowing what kind of exiſtence we have, and to whom we are indebted for it. This we can by no means ſuppoſe was out of the pſalmiſt's mind, when he ſaid unto God, in the words of the text, "I will praiſe thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." To ſuppoſe, that he had no reſpect to the internal powers and faculties of ſoul, with which he was endowed, would be doing violence to reaſon; for without theſe, he would never have known to whom he was indebted for his exiſtence, nor been capable of praiſing God for it. On the whole, it is clearly evident, that when the pſalmiſt ſays to God, "I will praiſe thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made," he means to expreſs his gratitude to him, not barely that he had given him ſuch a curious and wonderful body: but that he had given him ſuch a ſtill more noble and admirable ſoul; or that he had given him *ſuch an exiſtence*, made him *ſuch a creature*, as he found himſelf to be. And who, you may ſay, is there, who does not feel thankful, not only that he has an exiſtence, but that he has a rational exiſtence, that he is made man?

I doubt not but mankind in general are glad, that they have an exiſtence; that they eſteem it a happineſs, that they are men, and not beaſts; that they are wiſer than the beaſts of the field, and have more underſtanding than the fowls of the air. But, ſtill I believe, that a great part of mankind do but little conſider what a being man is, and ſtill leſs do they feel their obligation to praiſe God, that he has made them men. It is, undoubtedly, pleaſing to the pride of the human heart, to think that we ſtand high in the ſcale of being; that man was made but a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honor; that he is at the head of this lower world, and has dominion over all the creatures. Every thing that tends to ſwell the heart with pride, and make men feel important in their own view, is very pleaſing to them. In this view, there are but very few of mankind but what are pleaſed with the idea, that they are men.

But there have been thoſe among mankind, who, on account of ſome outward trouble and affliction, which has befallen them, or ſome inward anguiſh and horror, which has overwhelmed their ſpirits, have envied the beaſts their happineſs, and have wiſhed, that they had been formed dogs, rather than men. Others, again, have been ſo overborne with the burdens of life, and felt exiſtence ſo intolerable, that they have, with their own hands, cut the thread of life; vainly imagining, that there was no other ſtate, beyond the preſent, and that

death would reduce them to their original nothing. Such characters, however, have made but a very ſmall part of mankind; moſt men eſteem life a favor, are glad of exiſtence, and wiſh to have it continued; and the greateſt unhappineſs they feel, ariſes from the thought, that they muſt die—that they muſt quit the preſent ſtate, and enter an unknown world. This, I preſume, is the caſe with the greater part of my preſent hearers. Life is not a burden to you; you do not wiſh to end your exiſtence; but, on the contrary, you are glad, if not thankful, that you have been brought into being, that you have been made men, and that you are ſtill continued in life. Permit me, then, to lead you to a view of man, and to a particular inquiry, whether you have felt your obligation to be thankful to God, that he has made you men. If we are thankful to God, that he has given us being, that he has made us men, we ſhall then be thankful,

1. That we are made rational creatures.

By the faculty of reaſon, man is diſtinguiſhed from all the creatures that inhabit this world. Though there appears to be that ſagacity in many kinds of animals, which approaches near to rationality; yet we cannot ſuppoſe, that they are truly and properly rational creatures. By the rational powers and faculties, which man poſſeſſes, he is not only raiſed above the beaſts, but he is allied to angels, and may claim kindred with the hoſts of heaven; yea, more, by being a rational creature, he is capable

of

of bearing the moral image of God, and being conformed to that all perfect Being. By *reason*, we are capacitated, not only to enjoy the good things of this life, with a greater reliſh, and higher degree of ſatisfaction; but we are capacitated for the purer and more ſublime pleaſures of true religion; we are capacitated to enjoy thoſe rational and divine pleaſures, with which God himſelf is delighted. Who then can help being pleaſed with the thought, that he is a rational creature, that he is poſſeſſed, not only of a body fearfully and wonderfully made, but of a ſoul ſtill more wonderful and excellent? Who would be willing to exchange ſtates with an idiot, or with a brute? And who can help feeling his obligation to bleſs God, that he has made him a man? Or to praiſe the ſovereign Creator, who, having a right from the ſame clay to form one veſſel to honor and another to diſhonor, has formed him a veſſel of honor, in this reſpect, that he has ſtamped his own image upon it, and made it fit for the higheſt and nobleſt uſe, even for rational and divine employment? That you are pleaſed with your exiſtence, in this view of it, that you are glad that you are men, ſo far as we have already attended to the nature and character of man, I cannot doubt; but this may be, and yet you may not be truly thankful to God, that he has made you ſuch creatures, nor ever once ſaid in your hearts, "I will praiſe thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Strange as it may well ſeem, it is ſtill true, that very few of

mankind are really thankful for their exiſtence, though they are ſo greatly pleaſed with the thought, that they are men; and very few act worthily of the character of rational beings.

2. Thoſe who are thankful, that they are made men, are thankful that they are made moral agents, and accountable creatures.

It is a truth, which admits of no diſpute, that man is a moral agent, and therefore an accountable creature; and muſt give account to his Maker for the uſe and improvement of his moral powers and capacities, with which he is endowed, and for every talent, with which he is entruſted. We conceive it to be true, that God never did, and never can, conſiſtently, make a rational creature, who is not a moral agent, and accountable for his conduct. Angels and men are the only rational creatures, the only moral agents, that we have any account of. Theſe are neceſſarily under moral law, or moral obligation to love God, and obey all his commands. Little is ſaid in the Bible, becauſe little is neceſſary for us to know, concerning the moral obligation of angels, or the particular law, which they were under, and the particular ſin, by which vaſt numbers of them fell from their original rectitude and happineſs; yet enough is ſaid reſpecting them, to prove, that they are rational beings, moral agents, and accountable to God for their conduct. Men, as we juſt obſerved, are all the rational creatures, except angels, that we have any

account

account of, and probably all that God ever made. As to ourſelves, we know, that by being made rational creatures, we are moral agents ; that is, we are capable of acting of choice, and of being governed by motives preſented to our view. Man has underſtanding, which capacitates him to judge of the nature of thoſe motives, which are ſet before him ; and natural conſcience, which points out the difference between moral good and evil ; ſo that he never needs to do wrong, and indeed never can do wrong, unleſs he does it freely and voluntarily. If man be a rational creature, if he be a moral agent, if he be capable of ſeeing and feeling the difference between right and wrong, (which no one will deny,) then he muſt neceſſarily be the ſubject of moral government ; that is, he muſt neceſſarily be under obligation to that which is right and good, and to avoid that which is evil and ſinful. This obligation every moral agent muſt neceſſarily be under, antecedently to any particular and poſitive command of his Maker. Nor can God himſelf, conſiſtently with eternal truth and juſtice, or conſiſtently with his own infinite perfection, releaſe mankind from this natural obligation. Hence, if we be men, if we be rational beings and moral agents, we muſt be the ſubjects of moral government, and under moral obligation to love God with all our hearts, as a Being infinitely glorious and good. To do this is nothing more, than in heart to approve of that, which is in-

finitely right and fit. And the rule of duty therefore is, in every reſpect, and in all things, to act from this great principle, An hearty approbation of that which is right and good; which neceſſarily implies an hearty diſapprobation of that which is evil or ſinful. More than this God never did require, and leſs than this he never can require, becauſe this would be contrary to immutable rectitude. Hence, it may with propriety be ſaid, that that law of God, which requires us to love God with all our hearts, does not properly make it duty thus to love God; but it requires this love, becauſe it is our duty, or becauſe it was antecedently fit and proper. And if man be a moral agent, if he be under moral obligation to God, this muſt neceſſarily imply, that he is, in ſome way, accountable to God for his conduct. It does not, perhaps, neceſſarily imply, that there muſt be a particular formal trial and examination had; but it plainly implies, that man, who is under law to God, muſt be liable to the divine diſpleaſure, if he violates his moral obligation to his Maker. Theſe obſervations clearly prove, that men are moral agents, and therefore that they are accountable to God for their conduct.

And the leaſt attention to the Bible will enable us to ſee, in a light as clear as the noon day ſun, that *as men* we are moral agents, and accountable to God for all our conduct, at all times; that we muſt give an account to God, not only for our external

external actions, but for all the thoughts and affections of our hearts; for God will judge the ſecrets of men. This is true, not only of thoſe who enjoy the light of the goſpel, but of thoſe who live in heathen lands; it is true of all mankind, of every rational and moral agent. He who is a man, he who belongs to the human race, is an accountable being. And he who is thankful for his exiſtence, thankful that he is made a man, muſt, for the ſame reaſon, be thankful, that he is made a moral agent, and accountable to God for his conduct. If it be a favor, which demands our gratitude, that we are made men, that we are made rational creatures, then it equally demands our gratitude, that we are made accountable creatures; for theſe can never be ſeparated. The very idea of man ſuppoſes a rational and accountable creature. And if men, though rational beings, do act irrationally, or contrary to reaſon, are they, on this account, free from all obligation to gratitude, for the reaſon which God has given them? And if moral and accountable agents do tranſgreſs the firſt law of creation, and expoſe themſelves to the diſpleaſure of their Creator, are they, therefore, under no obligation to bleſs God, that he has made them men? In this view of human nature, in this view of yourſelves, may I not aſk, Are you thankful, that you are made men? Can you ſay with the Pſalmiſt, "I will praiſe thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made?"

It is probable that this queſtion, before we proceed any further in the ſubject, may be ſufficient to try many hearts. How many of mankind are there, who would gladly ſeparate what God has joined together! They would gladly have the favor of reaſon, and be able to act as they pleaſe, and yet be under no moral obligation, nor liable to any accountableneſs to God. They wiſh to live like men, that is, as men do live, enjoying all the advantages of men in this life, and yet to die like brutes, or rather to be as unaccountable for their conduct as they are. But this can never be. To be a brute, is to be deſtitute of reaſon, incapable of moral obligation, and free from accountableneſs; but to be a man, is to be a rational creature, under moral obligation, and therefore accountable for his conduct. And, now, which ſtate do you chooſe? Would you be a man? or would you be a beaſt? Are you truly glad, that you are made a man, and thankful to Him, who made you ſuch? Let your life and conduct anſwer the queſtion. I may here add,

3. That he, who is thankful for his exiſtence, will be thankful, that he is a dependent creature.

It is true, indeed, man is not, in this reſpect, diſtinguiſhed from any or every other creature, which God has made. This is common to angels, to men, and to beaſts. God is the only independent Being in the univerſe. To be creatures, is neceſſarily to be

wholly

wholly dependent on God for our exiſtence—for our continuance in exiſtence—for the continuance of the free exerciſe of reaſon, and all the powers and capacities, which depend upon reaſon. In *every* reſpect, therefore, we are dependent on God: In him we live and move and have our being; and all our ſufficiency, for any thing, is of God.

Man is no leſs dependent now for his exiſtence, and for ſuch an exiſtence as he has, than he was antecedently to his beginning to exiſt. And during time and eternity, we ſhall be entirely dependent, on God, for our exiſtence and happineſs. By being made rational creatures, we are made capable of knowing our dependence, (which the brutes are not,) and ought to be willingly and thankfully dependent, rejoicing that we are capable of knowing that God, in whoſe hand our breath is, and whoſe are all our ways. I know that there is, in fallen man, that pride and haughtineſs of heart, which leads him to aſpire after independence. Gladly would he renounce all dependence on his Maker, and be as independent as God himſelf. But this is an unreaſonable and ſinful deſire, and the ſource of every ſin. Were it poſſible for him to be as independent as he could wiſh, he would only be the more unhappy and miſerable; for there is nothing neceſſary to make him miſerable, but for God to give him up to his own heart's luſts, and let him eat the fruit of his own ways, and be filled with his own devices.

devices. We ought, therefore, to be thankful to God, that he has made us dependent creatures, and cheerfully give up our ſoul and body, for time and eternity, to the divine diſpoſal. Convinced that he only is truly happy, who has choſen God for his portion, and whoſe hope the Lord is, and poſſeſſed of a meek, humble, dependent ſpirit, we ſhall be really thankful for our exiſtence; we ſhall rejoice, that we are made rational, accountable, immortal creatures, who are capable of being forever happy in the love and ſervice of our Maker; and we ſhall be entirely willing to live in this world, or to be removed from it, juſt as the ſovereign Diſpoſer of all events ſhall ſee fit to order.

SERMON

SERMON II.

Thankfulneſs for Exiſtence.

PSALM cxxxix. 14.

I will praiſe thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

THE more attentively we ſurvey the works of creation in general, and obſerve the infinite variety, beauty, and regularity, which is manifeſted therein, the more we ſhall be diſpoſed to join the devout Pſalmiſt, and ſay, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all." All God's works, in ſome way or other, praiſe him; for they all ſhew forth his glory. But rational creatures, who are capable of ſeeing God in all things, who are capable of knowing from whom all things proceeded, and for whom they were all made, are under the greateſt obligation to praiſe God, for what he is in himſelf, and for all the manifeſtations, which he has made of his adorable character, to the view of his intelligent creatures; and to bleſs him, that he

has

has made them capable of beholding his glory, and of ſhewing forth his praiſe. And where is the creature of God to be found, who is under greater obligation to praiſe him than his creature man? If he was made, at firſt, a little lower than the angels; yet, by his redemption, he may be raiſed higher than they. For, to which of the angels ſaid he at any time, "Sit thou at my right hand?" But unto man he ſaith, "He that overcometh, to him will I grant, that he ſhall ſit with me on my throne, even as I alſo have overcome, and am ſit down with my Father on his throne." "And know ye not alſo that we ſhall judge angels?" Man, therefore, is under the higheſt obligation to praiſe God, that he has given him exiſtence, and that he has given him ſuch an exiſtence, made him ſuch a creature. But in order to feel our obligation to bleſs God, that he has given us ſuch an exiſtence, we ought to know and conſider what creatures we are. Many, without thinking or knowing what creatures they are, are ready to imagine, that they are glad, and even thankful, that they are men. But what is man? He is a rational creature, poſſeſſed of a ſoul endowed with high and noble powers and capacities, by which he is allied to ſpirits of another world, and even connected with God himſelf. He is, moreover, a moral agent; he has a will to chooſe, or refuſe; he is capable of judging of the motives ſet before him, and of acting accordingly; and therefore he is an accountable creature.

Thus

Thus far we proceeded in our diſcourſe in the former part of the day, and endeavored to ſhow man's obligation to be thankful, that he was made ſuch a being. But it would be injuſtice to our ſubject, to ſtop here; and therefore we proceed to add,

4. He, who is thankful to God, that he has made him a man, is thankful that he was made for an endleſs duration—that he ſhall never ceaſe to be.

In this, man is diſtinguiſhed from all the creatures that inhabit this world. They were formed for the uſe of man, during his abode on earth, and they have bodies endowed only with animal and ſenſitive life. They have no immortal ſpirits within; when they die, they ceaſe forever to exiſt, having nothing within them to ſurvive the body, or to exiſt in a future ſtate. But man is poſſeſſed, not only of a body fearfully and wonderfully made, which muſt ſoon turn to duſt, and moulder in the grave; but this body is actuated by a ſpirit, which can never die, never ceaſe to be, nor ever be in a ſtate of inſenſibility. Philoſophers have argued the immortality of the ſoul, from its immateriality, from its being a pure or ſimple ſpirit, and partaking of nothing in its nature, which is or can be corruptible or diſſoluble. But though this be a probable, yet it is not a concluſive argument. For every being, whether material or immaterial, whether body or ſpirit, depends entirely on the power and pleaſure of the Deity, for its continuance in exiſtence. It is, however, clearly evident from Scripture,

ture, that the ſoul of man is immortal; that when it has once begun to exiſt, it ſhall never ceaſe to exiſt. And it appears probable at leaſt, if not certain, that God never yet created a rational being, for a temporary or finite exiſtence; for every rational being muſt be a moral agent, and every moral agent muſt be accountable, and therefore muſt exiſt beyond his ſtate of trial and probation, in order to receive the recompenſe of his works. But, as I juſt obſerved, the word of God leaves no room to queſtion, whether the ſoul of man ſhall exiſt forever. Life and immortality are brought to light in the goſpel; yea, the goſpel aſſures us, that theſe bodies, which we ſee turning to corruption, and buried in the duſt, ſhall hereafter be raiſed from the grave, be formed ſpiritual and incorruptible, and the ſouls which had been ſeparated from them, ſhall be reunited to them, and both exiſt together in a ſtate unchangeable and eternal. So that all mankind, who have once begun to exiſt, ſhall continue to exiſt forever.

If it be a favor to have exiſtence, it is a favor to have that exiſtence continued; and mankind in general are as glad that their life is continued, as that they were brought into life, at firſt. Men naturally dread the thought of dying, and ſtill more of ceaſing forever to exiſt. Annihilation is a dreadful thought! It is granted, however, that ſome men are more afraid of exiſtence than of ceaſing forever to be; nor is it to be doubted, but that the exiſtence

ence of ſome, will be much more terrible than annihilation. "And how, may one and another ſay, do I know, that this will not be my caſe? How do I know, but that my miſery, in another world, will be ſuch, as that I ſhall wiſh I had never been born?" This is, indeed, a ſolemn and important thought! It demands attention! For this will undoubtedly be the caſe with many of mankind, and probably with ſome of you. But, notwithſtanding this, are you not under obligation now to bleſs God, that he has given you exiſtence, and ſuch an exiſtence as you have? Is it not a favor to enjoy ſuch exiſtence as you now enjoy? Would you be willing to exchange your preſent condition with a beaſt? Would you be willing, this moment, to be ſtruck out of exiſtence, and ceaſe forever to be? No, you would not. You are, then, this moment, under obligation to bleſs God for your preſent exiſtence, as a rational and accountable creature; and you ought to be thankful, that you have entered upon an exiſtence, which ſhall never ceaſe, though *the preſent ſtate* of it may and will come to an end. For it is certain, that God has placed you in ſuch a ſituation, that your future exiſtence will be infinitely more happy than the preſent, if it be not your own fault. And if you ſhould abuſe your preſent life, ſo as to render your future ſtate awfully miſerable, will this leſſen your obligation to bleſs God, that he has put you into a ſituation, in which you may ſecure eternal life and happineſs,

if you will only comply with the terms of the gospel? Was Adam under less obligation to bless God that he had made him, after he fell, than he was before? No, certainly. Suppose I confer a favor upon you, which, if rightly improved, will render you completely happy, but you abuse it and become the more miserable, is your obligation to me, on this account, the less? No, certainly. Such is the case between God and your own soul. God has made you a man, a rational and accountable creature, has made you for an endless existence, and has placed you in such a situation, as that you may enjoy endless felicity, if it be not your own fault. What gratitude, what praise is due from you to God on this account! Who can help seeing his obligation to bless God, that he has made him, not for a momentary existence in this life only, and then to sink into his original nothing; but that he has made him for an endless and unchangeable state, and given him now an opportunity of securing eternal peace and happiness? This leads me to add,

5. He who is truly thankful to God, that he has made him a man, made him such a creature as he is, will be thankful that he is now placed in a state of trial and probation for eternity.

We have before observed, that every rational creature, every moral agent, must necessarily be under moral obligation to do that which is right and good, and to avoid that which is evil and sinful, and therefore must be accountable to God for

his

his conduct. This ſuppoſes, that every rational creature muſt, for a *time*, be in a ſtate of trial and probation. This term of trial and probation may be longer or ſhorter, as infinite wiſdom ſhall ſee fit to order. But it does not appear conſiſtent, that God ſhould ever make a rational creature, a moral agent, and immediately confirm him in an unchanging ſtate of holineſs and happineſs, without his paſſing through a ſtate of previous trial. And we are pretty certain, that he never did do it; for it is evident, that both angels and men (who are all the moral agents that we have any account of) were placed in a ſtate of trial and probation. Nor does it appear proper, that they ſhould be always continued in ſuch a ſtate. Though no rational creature can ever be diſcharged from moral obligation to do that which is right and good, and to avoid that which is evil and ſinful, and therefore can never be without law to God; yet God may and does confirm creatures in a ſtate of holineſs and happineſs, after paſſing through a ſtate of trial, by which it becomes certain, that they never ſhall ſin, becauſe they are ſecured by the power and oath of God. Previouſly to this confirmation in holineſs, we ſay, every moral agent muſt paſs through a ſtate of trial and probation. This ſtate of trial and probation mankind are in, while in this world. This is abundantly evident from the whole tenor of ſacred Scripture, as well as from many particular paſſages, which need not (it is preſumed) be here recited. It is

true, that the very first act of sin, the first violation of the moral law of God, might end the state of trial with every moral agent, and sink him down into endless misery, as the just punishment of his criminal conduct. This certainly was the case with the fallen angels; and fallen man would have been doomed to endless misery, on the first offence, if it had not been for the intervention of a Redeemer, and that method of grace, which God has instituted through him. And now, though every transgression of the moral law deserves the wrath and curse of God forever, as much as if there had been no Savior provided for us, yet God has been pleased to place us under a different trial from that in which man was placed in a state of innocence. So that whoever of the guilty race of man shall truly repent of his sin, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall obtain the pardon of his many and aggravated offences, and receive eternal life. Mankind are, therefore, each and every one of them, as really and truly in a state of trial and probation, as Adam was while in the garden of Eden. And God has been pleased to assure us in his word, how long this state of trial and probation shall last; that is, so long as this life shall last, or during our continuance on earth, and no longer. We are, therefore, each of us, under the greatest obligation to bless God, that we are now in such a state of trial and probation, and to be concerned that we improve it wisely and well. There is a

disposition,

diſpoſition, too natural to mankind, to complain of God himſelf, that in conſequence of the firſt ſin of Adam, we are prone to ſin, and have not a fair opportunity to regain the divine favor. But this complaint and objection is infinitely unreaſonable, not only as our proneneſs to ſin does not leſſen the evil of ſin, or the criminality in it; but eſpecially as we are under that gracious diſpenſation, which provides a pardon for our many offences, if we repent and believe the goſpel, and accept God's offered grace. Therefore, though many will abuſe the day and means of grace, and though we may do it, and continue in ſin through the whole time of our trial and probation on earth, and ſink down into endleſs and remedileſs miſery, ſo that it would have been good for us, if we had never been born; yet, as we are now probationers for eternity, as we now have an opportunity, in which we may ſecure endleſs glory and felicity; we are under infinite obligation to bleſs God, that he has made us men; that he has made us rational creatures, moral agents; that he has made us for an endleſs ſtate of exiſtence; that he has ſent us into this world on a ſtate of trial and probation; and that the happineſs or miſery of eternity depends on the improvement of the preſent ſhort and uncertain life.

And now let me aſk you, in this view of the ſubject, are you thankful to God, that he has made you men? that he has made you ſuch creatures as we have repreſented mankind to be? Are you really

glad that you are men? Or do you wish that you had never been born? Or that you had been beasts, or been any thing else, rather than men?

The question is certainly of real importance, and calculated to prove and try your hearts. If you are really thankful, that you are men, that you are such beings as God has made you, or even if you are only glad, that you are made such, you will wish and desire to live like men, to act agreeably to the character you sustain, and the rank which God has given you among his creatures. But do you act, or wish and desire to act thus? Alas! man being in honor abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish. How low is human nature capable of falling, and how low must he be fallen, who, possessing a rational and immortal soul, lives like a brute, desiring and indulging sensual enjoyments and gratifications only! And some there have been so lost to all the dignity of man, as to wish to exchange conditions even with a dog. And probably there are many more, who have wished, or who will wish, that they had never been born. But, however this may be, and whether this is, or will be the case with you, or me, it is certainly important for us to remember what beings we are, and to live and act like men.

Whether we are thankful to God or not, that we were made men, whether we are pleased or displeased with our existence, certain it is, the sovereign Creator of the universe, who made all beings

and

and things according to his pleaſure, has made us men; he has given us a rational and immortal ſoul, which muſt exiſt forever; he has made us moral agents and accountable creatures; he has placed us in a ſtate of trial and probation, and ſuſpended the happineſs or miſery of a never ending eternity, upon our conduct in this world. Hence it is, that he addreſſes us in theſe words, "Shew yourſelves men;" that is, live and act like men. Only act in character, act like men, like ſuch rational, immortal, and accountable creatures as you are, and you will then feel that you have reaſon, through the ceaſeleſs ages of eternity, to bleſs God, that he has given you exiſtence, and that he has made you men. Often examine your conduct, aſk your own hearts, whether ſuch and ſuch conduct is worthy a rational, an immortal, an accountable creature? Aſk your own hearts, how ſuch and ſuch actions will appear to you, when viewed in the eternal world? Whether it will then be a pleaſing thought, that you have acted thus and thus? And remember, that the preſent life is ſhort and momentary, in compariſon with eternity, for which you were made, and in which you muſt exiſt. Remember, that all the joys and ſorrows, all the pleaſures and pains, of the preſent ſtate, are not worthy to be compared with thoſe of eternity.

It may with propriety be ſaid, that God requires nothing more of any of his creatures than this, that they act agreeably to the character, which he

has given them, agreeably to the rank in which he has placed them; and leſs than this he cannot require. Complain not, that you were not made angels; for then angelic ſervice would have been required of you; and angels too, as well as men, have fallen. Complain not, that you were not made brutes; for you are raiſed far above them, by a rational and immortal ſoul. Rather bleſs God, that he has made you men, and live and act worthy of ſuch a character, and ternity ſhall crown you with immortal glory, honor and felicity!

The ſubject, which I have written and delivered to you this day, was particularly choſen by me, becauſe I wiſhed, for my own ſake, to attend to it, and preach it over to my own heart, the laſt week, in the view of the day of my nativity. Laſt Friday was the anniverſary day of my birth, on which day I completed the 45th year of my age. On ſuch days, it becomes us particularly to recognize the goodneſs of God, in giving us life, as well as continuing us in it. But, how can we give thanks to God for life, unleſs we know and conſider what a life, what an exiſtence we have? Can he be thankful to God for continuance in life, who is not thankful that life, or exiſtence, was given to him? And can he be thankful for exiſtence, who is not thankful for juſt ſuch an exiſtence as he has? Certainly, it is more than time for us all to conſider who and what we are, and for what we were

brought

brought into being, and whether we are acting our part well or not.

Permit me to remind you alſo, that this day completes nineteen years of my miniſtry among you. On this 9th day of February, nineteen years ago, I was ſolemnly ſet apart to the work of the goſpel miniſtry among you. It becomes me today, to bleſs God, not only that he has made me a man, but that he has made me a miniſter of the goſpel, to teſtify the grace of God to you, and that he has continued me ſo long in life, and ſo long in this work. I know, that it becomes me to be deeply humble, that I have ſpent ſo many years, in ſo unworthy and unprofitable a manner, and ſolemnly to give up myſelf to the mercy, the power, and the grace of God. And let me aſk of every praying chriſtian in this aſſembly, that, when he is neareſt the throne of grace, and moſt fervently imploring grace for himſelf, that he would then remember his miniſter.

To conclude; let us all realize, that we are accountable creatures, and that the great day of account is juſt at hand (how near God only knows) when you and I, muſt each ſtand in his lot, and be judged, by that Being, who has "formed us of clay, and made us men," and "who will render to every man according to his works. To them who, by patient continuance in well doing, ſeek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life: But unto them who are contentious and do not

obey the truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs, indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew firſt and alſo of the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace to every man that worketh good; to the Jew firſt and alſo to the Gentile; for there is no reſpect of perſons with God."

SERMON.

SERMON III.

The Moral State of the World.

I. JOHN, v. 19.

And the whole world lieth in wickedneſs.

AND thus it would forever have lain, in wickedneſs and miſery, had not the God of all grace, deviſed a way for the recovery of ſome of the fallen children of men, through the death and mediation of his own Son. Yea, St. John ſays, that this is even now the ſtate of the world, notwithſtanding Chriſt has actually come, and made atonement for ſin, and wrought out an everlaſting righteouſneſs, for all who believe in him. "The whole world lieth in wickedneſs." This repreſents the natural ſtate and character of mankind. And conſidering the expreſſion in this ſenſe, it juſtly applies to the whole world, even to every individual of the human race, without a ſingle exception; for "they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not *one*, they are all gone out of the way." And in this ſtate the whole world lieth;

lieth; *i. e.* remaineth, or continueth, without any effort to recover itſelf, until God is pleaſed, by his power and grace, to raiſe here and there one to ſpiritual and divine life. Some there are, who are the happy ſubjects of ſuch a ſaving change. Of ſuch the apoſtle ſpeaks in the former clauſe of this verſe. "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedneſs." So that when he ſays, "*we know that we are of God*," he muſt mean to exclude himſelf, and his fellow chriſtians, from the general character of the world of mankind, or when he ſays "*the whole world*," he muſt mean the world at large, or mankind in general. A part, by far the greateſt part, being put for the whole. Theſe ideas are immediately ſuggeſted, by the words of our text:

I. That this world is a wicked world.

II. That not only ſome parts or places of the world, but all parts and places of it, are wicked. And,

III. That it lieth or remaineth in wickedneſs, notwithſtanding all the means or methods made uſe of to reform and amend it.

I. The firſt idea, which occurs to mind from the words of our text, is, that this world, in which we live, is a wicked world; that there is not only ſome wickedneſs in it, but a great deal of wickedneſs in it; that wickedneſs prevails and abounds in it, much more than virtue, holineſs or goodneſs. That there is wickedneſs in the world, we all know,

and

and confeſs daily ; we do not need to go to the Bible to find the truth of this. Every perſon, who has grown to years of knowledge and obſervation, finds it true, with reſpect to himſelf, that he is a ſinner, and has done many actions, for which his conſcience condemns him. It is preſumed, that there is ſcarcely a child of ſix years old, but what is conſcious to himſelf, that he has often done wickedly. Children, as well as men, know, that there is much wickedneſs in the world. By wickedneſs here, we mean that outward conduct, which is injurious to mankind, and which all agree to call criminal. There are many, who ſeem to be totally ignorant of ſin in the heart ; and therefore have little or no ſenſe how ſinful mankind really are. All their ideas of ſin ſeem to be confined to outward acts of wickedneſs, which are expreſsly forbidden, either by the laws of God, or man. But even in this ſenſe, they will allow that there is much wickedneſs in the world ; yea, that the world is full of wickedneſs. Indeed, we muſt deny our own ſenſes, to deny this. For, how often do we hear of horrid murders, robberies, thefts, rapes, adulteries, fornications, blaſphemies, drunkenneſſes, quarrels, contentions, and vices of ſo many kinds, that we can hardly find names for them ! When we confine our attention to ſuch ſpecies of barbarity and injuſtice, between man and man, we often find occaſion to ſay, the world is full of wickedneſs ; meaning that there is a great deal of wickedneſs in the

world.

world. It is in this view, that the heathen nations have obſerved the corruption and degeneracy of mankind, and have been utterly at a loſs to account for it. But when we ſpeak of the wickedneſs of the world, or the ſinfulneſs of mankind, we ought not to confine our thoughts to that kind of wickedneſs, which is an iniquity to be puniſhed by the judges among men; but to conſider all the corruptions of the human heart, all ſecret as well as open ſins, all ſins againſt God, as well as acts of injuſtice, unkindneſs, and uncharitableneſs towards our fellow creatures. When we conſider the wickedneſs of the world in this view, which is a juſt view, we ſhall then undoubtedly ſay, the world is full of ſin and iniquity. For, in this ſenſe, no man is free from ſin; even the beſt of men have much ſin remaining in them. "There is not a juſt man upon earth, who doeth good, and ſinneth not." This leads to the ſecond idea ſuggeſted by the text, viz.

II. That not only ſome, but all parts of the world, are full of wickedneſs. It is not only true, that there is wickedneſs in the world, yea, much, very much wickedneſs among men, and this in ſome particular parts or places; but it is true of all places, of all parts of the world, and of all nations of mankind. The *whole world* is full of wickedneſs. Men are ſometimes ready to think, perhaps, that they live in the moſt wicked part of the world, and in the moſt degenerate day; that there never was a

time

time when the world was ſo wicked as it is now; and that there is no place ſo bad as that in which they live: But this is not true; it has always been ſo, and is ſo every where; for the whole world is full of wickedneſs. There is no reaſon to doubt, however, that vice and wickedneſs do much more abound and prevail at ſome times, and in ſome particular places, than others. The men of Sodom were evidently more corrupt than mankind in general, or elſe they would not have been ſo ſignally deſtroyed. Vice and wickedneſs, eſpecially open immorality, more generally prevailed, in the days of Noah, than before that time; otherwiſe God would not, at once, have ſwept the world of its inhabitants by a flood. And the children of Iſrael were, at ſome times, more loſt to all ſenſe of the true God, and his worſhip, and more given up to idolatry, than at other times; which was the reaſon of their being puniſhed, by particular judgments. And the hiſtory of the church contained in the Bible, as well as that given by common writers, abundantly proves, that religion flouriſhes more at ſome times than at others, and in ſome places more than in others. And the experience and obſervation of the aged among us, will undoubtedly teach them, that there have been times, when religion flouriſhed more than at the preſent day; when vices appeared few and ſmall to what they do now, in this land. And even in the preſent day, we can hear of ſome particular towns

and

and places, where there appears to be a very great revival of religion, and many concerned to ſecure the one thing needful; while, in moſt places, religion appears to be very little, if at all, attended to, and vice and immorality greatly prevail. But, notwithſtanding theſe things muſt be granted, yet there is not, perhaps, that difference, which many ſeem to imagine. Different vices prevail in different places, and at different periods. In one age, or in one place, the prevailing and faſhionable vice is gaming; in another place we hear nothing of this, but there drinking prevails; in another place, or at another time, quarrels and contentions prevail. Cuſtom and faſhion mark the differently prevailing vices and follies of mankind, in different countries, ages, and places; but, go where you will, you find the whole world lying in wickedneſs. Some men are much more abandoned to vice and wickedneſs than others; but perhaps there are not many more of this character in one age, or country, in proportion to its numbers, than in another. If we attend to the cuſtoms and manners, the vices and immoralities of the heathen nations, we are ſurpriſed at their idolatry, impiety, profaneneſs, and open acts of uncleanneſs, practiſed at their religious and ſolemn feſtivals. If we look among the Mahometans, the followers of the great impoſtor, we are ſurpriſed at their infatuation, their groſs, abſurd, and inconſiſtent ideas of religion and future happineſs. If we

turn our thoughts to the votaries of the Popiſh religion, we are no leſs ſhocked at their idolatry, ſuperſtition, vain ceremonies, and falſe refuges. But if we come to chriſtian, and what are commonly called reformed, nations, have we leſs reaſon to be ſurpriſed? How many ſects, and denominations, and perſuaſions, do we find among them? And is the moral character of chriſtain nations any better than that of Papiſts, Mahometans, or Heathens? Are there not many infidels in a chriſtian land? And are there not even more vices to be found among the civilized, and what we call chriſtianized inhabitants of America, than among the ſavage nations? And are not thoſe vices to be found among us, more infamous, and more pernicious to ſociety, than thoſe to be found among them? Why do we ſee the mote in another's eye, and not caſt the beam out of our own eye? What reaſon have we to complain of the wickedneſs of others, when we are ſo wicked ourſelves? Surely the whole world is buried in ſin, wickedneſs, and guilt! But, when it is ſaid, "the world *lieth* in wickedneſs," the expreſſion may further ſuggeſt this idea,

III. That it continueth, or remaineth in wickedneſs, notwithſtanding all the means or methods made uſe of, to reform, or amend it. This idea ſeems to be ſtrongly expreſſed in the text; becauſe lying down denotes a ſtate of quietude and reſt, or a fixed and ſteady continuance in the ſame ſtate. And, in

this

this ſenſe, the apoſtle might, with great propriety, ſay, that the whole world *lieth* in wickedneſs; for it has lain or remained in ſuch a ſtate, for almoſt ſix thouſand years, notwithſtanding every thing, which has been done, to reclaim or reform it. Sin began in our world with the firſt human pair; nor has a ſingle generation continued free from it, though God made man upright. And it ſeems probable, that our firſt parents did not continue many days in a ſtate of holineſs, before they fell. From that day to this, all fleſh have corrupted their ways, and the whole world of mankind have lain in wickedneſs. Not one of the human race has been free from ſin. No place, no age, has been free from wickedneſs. Even in the family of Adam, the moſt abominable acts of wickedneſs were found. Cain, his firſt born ſon, inhumanly imbrued his hands in his brother's blood. And very ſoon again, even before Adam's death, we find Lamech confeſſing, "I have ſlain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt;" and ſaying, "if Cain ſhall be avenged ſeven fold, ſurely Lamech ſeventy and ſeven fold." It appears from the ſhort hiſtory contained in the former part of the book of Geneſis, that when men mutiplied and became numerous, the earth was filled with violence, and the wickedneſs of man was ſo great upon the earth, that God determined to ſweep the world of its inhabitants, and to ſave none but Noah and his family, even eight perſons, who were the only right-

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eous perſons to be found on earth. Among all the many millions of inhabitants, which the earth then contained, it is evident, that theſe eight were all that had any fear of God before their eyes—any religion at all. Nor does it appear, that even the family of Noah were real ſaints. They might be ſaved only for Noah's ſake; for God ſays to him, "*Thee only* have I ſeen righteous before me, in this generation." And the hiſtory of the Bible, together with other hiſtories, is a clear demonſtration, that the world has lain in wickedneſs ever ſince; that there has been no age, nor part of the world, free from ſin, from that day to this; and this notwithſtanding all that has been done, by God and man, to teach the world the evil and awful danger of ſin; and the infinite beauty, excellency, and happineſs of virtue and holineſs.

What has not God done, by way of motive and excitement, to induce mankind to forſake ſin? Or (if I may uſe the expreſſion) what pains has he not taken, to reform and amend the world? When he firſt made man, though he made him holy and upright; yet, as though he would effectually guard him againſt every danger and temptation, he plainly told him what would be, and what ſhould be, the conſequences of ſinning. And then, as ſoon as he had ſinned, though he gave him encouragement to hope for pardon, yet he cauſed him to feel the bitter effects of ſin, by dooming him to hard labor, pain, and death, and by curſing the ground

for his ſake, and driving him from the delightful garden of Eden. Adam now ſaw and felt the dreadful conſequences of ſin; he knew the awful difference between a ſtate of ſin and a ſtate of holineſs. And was it not that we know that the nature of ſin is to lead further into ſin, we ſhould ſuppoſe, that Adam never would have committed another ſin after the firſt. God's treatment of Adam was calculated to deter his immediate deſcendants, his family, from ſin; and yet Cain, though he had often heard of his father's fate, what his original ſtate was, how he fell, and what was the conſequence of it, preſumed to murder his own brother. God then brought ſuch heavy judgments upon Cain as led him to ſay, "My puniſhment is greater than I can bear;" yet this did not cure him of his ſinful diſpoſition, nor put a ſtop to his wickedneſs. And though God has, in every age of the world, and in every part of the world, been viſiting ſinners with his judgments, and inflicting his wrath upon the wicked, yet they have generally remained incorrigible. Though he has, at one time, ſwept the whole world of its ſinful inhabitants by a flood, and, at another, deſtroyed whole cities by fire; though he has cauſed the earth to open her mouth and ſwallow up the wicked; and though he has tried every calamity and judgment, in order to teach mankind the evil and danger of ſin; yet the whole world lieth in wickedneſs. Every generation has an opportunity of learning the deſtructive nature of ſin, from ſuch awful

awful diſplays of the divine diſpleaſure againſt it. And all theſe things are written for our admonition, to the intent, that we ſhould not luſt after evil things, as óthers have luſted, and periſhed.

But this is not all ; in addition to all the admonitions and warnings, which God has given to mankind, by his providential dealings, he has been calling upon a wicked world, in every age, by his ſervants the prophets, riſing up early and ſending them, ſaying, " O do not that abominable thing which I hate." Every argument and motive has been made uſe of, which is calculated to excite the hopes, to alarm the fears, or touch any of the feelings of the human heart ; and yet, notwithſtanding all theſe things, the whole world lieth and remaineth in the ſame ſtate of wickedneſs.

God has, alſo, at the ſame time, been endeavoring to teach mankind the ſafety, the comfort, and happineſs of ſuch as forſake ſin, return unto him, and ſecure his favor. For this purpoſe, he has, in every age, by the power of his grace and the influence of his Holy Spirit, taken poſſeſſion of the hearts of ſome, and made them the objects of his love. In them, and by his conduct towards them, he has taught a wicked world, in every age, what good they may enjoy, if they forſake their ſins, and return to him in the way he has appointed. How ſtrikingly did he teach this, in his preſervation of Noah and Lot, and in his conduct towards the patriarchs, prophets, and apoſtles ? How many and

how rich are his promiſess to all penitent, returning ſinners! Yet, notwithſtanding all God has done for his friends in particular, and though he has given his Son to die for mankind in general, ſtill the whole world lieth in wickedneſs. It appears not but that the world in general is now as wicked as before Chriſt came into it, to enlighten and reform it.

Great have been human efforts to reform the world; and reformations have taken place, in many things, and in many reſpects. Many important and uſeful improvements have been made, and are rapidly making, in agriculture, in manufactures, in the ſcience of politics, and indeed in all the arts and ſciences. But theſe do not mend the heart, nor root out wickedneſs from the world. Vice and wickedneſs, it is true, have often changed their names and altered their complexion; but ſtill they remain the ſame, in their nature and tendency. The truth is, men only grow more refined in wickedneſs, and more ſubtle in the arts of iniquity. An open diſregard to real religion, and a contempt of real vital piety, take place, under the pretence of caſting off ſuperſtition, and of imbibing a more liberal ſpirit. So that, as to any real alteration for the better, I ſee not the leaſt appearance of it; but ſtill the whole world lieth in wickedneſs.

SERMON.

SERMON IV.

The Moral State of the World.

I. JOHN, v. 19.

And the whole world lieth in wickedneſs.

WHAT a melancholy reflection is this! If we conſider this world as made by God, and peopled with a race of intelligent creatures, who are formed for the ſervice and enjoyment of their Maker, what a melancholy reflection is it, that they have all apoſtatized from him, deſerted his ſervice, turned to be his enemies, and lie dead in treſpaſſes and ſins! How many generations of ſuch rational and immortal creatures have already been on the earth! And how many millions and millions are ſtill in the world, lying in wickedneſs! This is not only the caſe with us in Brimfield, but it is ſo in the towns around us; it is ſo over all this ſtate; it is ſo in all the ſtates in the nation; it is ſo in every nation on earth—for the whole world lieth in wickedneſs. Melancholy thought! Enough to fill our hearts with grief, and our eyes with tears! "And

is it thus, O thou kind and beneficent Parent of the univerſe, that thy creatures requite thee for thy numerous favors to them! Is it thus, that they treat thine adorable Majeſty! Haſt thou no wrath for them to fear, nor grace for them to ſeek!" But what will the conſequence of all this be? Shall God forever loſe that glory, which is due to him from his creature man? Shall he loſe the world, which he hath made, and the many millions of rational beings, whom he hath formed to ſhew forth his praiſe? No, he will not do it. Could we turn aſide the veil which hides eternity from our view, we ſhould there ſee the glory of God ſhining forth in the eternal deſtruction of his enemies. Here, then, we are led again to ſay, how melancholy the thought, that the whole world lieth in wickedneſs, when we conſider how many millions of mankind there are, who are ſtanding on the verge of eternity, and juſt ready to fall into endleſs miſery!

On what a ſlippery ſteep,
The thoughtleſs creatures go!
And, O! that dreadful fiery deep,
That waits their fall below!

We have already obſerved, agreeably to the ſpirit of our text, that this world is a wicked world—that it is ſo in all parts and places of it—and that it ſtill continues in wickedneſs, notwithſtanding all the means and methods, which have been made uſe of to reform and amend it. Theſe thoughts naturally ſuggeſt ſome important inferences and reflections, which claim our ſerious attention.

IMPROVEMENT.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It is obvious to remark, that all mankind are, by nature, univerſally and totally corrupt and depraved.

If this were not the caſe, ſurely the whole world would not be ſo full of wickedneſs, notwithſtanding all that God and man have done to reſtrain and reform it. It is a truth, I think, written as with a ſun beam on every part of our world, that mankind are univerſally and totally corrupt. Their conduct confirms the divine declarations, that there is none that doeth good, no not one—that they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable. No part of the world has ever yet been diſcovered, where its inhabitants have not been found to be vicious, wicked and depraved. If mankind were not univerſally corrupt, ſurely there would have been ſome place found free from ſin, and ſome time found, when men did not do wickedly. But ſuch a time and place has not yet been diſcovered. Though this world has been groaning under the burden of ſin, for almoſt ſix thouſand years, and all mankind have been feeling the evil effects of it, ſtill the cauſe remains; ſin continues and reigns in full dominion. Though the world has been called, in every age, to witneſs the marks of God's awful diſpleaſure againſt ſin; yet it ſtill remains the ſame wicked world. The temper and diſpoſition of mankind has ever been

like that of the wicked Iſraelites, who, when they had juſt been ſmarting under the rod of divine chaſtiſement for their ſinful murmurs, yet inſtantly murmured again. When Korah and his company murmured againſt Moſes and Aaron, as aſſuming too much power and authority, God cauſed the earth to open its mouth, and ſwallow them up. But though the people were affrighted and fled away from the place; yet, we are informed, "on the morrow, all the congregation of the children of Iſrael murmured againſt Moſes and Aaron, ſaying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord." So it is with all mankind; though they know the judgments of God againſt the wicked, yet they do the ſame things, which have brought miſery and ruin upon others. This was the conduct of Belſhazzar. Daniel tells him, after reminding him of the pride and fall of his father, "And thou, his ſon, O Belſhazzar, haſt not humbled thine heart, *though thou knoweſt all this*, but haſt lifted up thyſelf againſt the Lord of heaven." Though men know the judgments, which God has brought upon the wicked, in ages paſt, and the awful threatenings, which lie againſt ſinners, in the world to come; and though they know the good, which God has heretofore conferred upon his friends, and the great and precious promiſes, which he makes to the righteous, yet ſtill the world lieth in wickedneſs. Now, is it poſſible to account for all this, unleſs we ſuppoſe, that all mankind are corrupt and depraved, prone to evil, and

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to that only and continually? Is it poſſible, that a man, who has his eyes open, and ſees the world around him, can deny the univerſal and total corruption and apoſtaſy of the human race? Are not mankind evidently reſolved on ſin, and determined in wickedneſs, notwithſtanding all that can be done or ſaid to reform them? O how fallen, how corrupt, how ſinful is human nature!

2. It is natural to reflect, that human nature is the ſame, in every age, and in every part of the world; for it has operated in the ſame manner, and produced the ſame effects, every where, and at all times.

There have been ſome perſons who have appeared ſeriouſly to queſtion, whether certain nations, who differ from the generality of mankind in their complexion, or the color of their ſkin, belong to the human race, or are the deſcendants of Adam. But are they not evidently poſſeſſed of the ſame nature, and do they not diſcover the ſame moral complexion, that is generally viſible in our world? It may well be preſumed, that God never yet made two different races of beings ſo nearly reſembling each other, as the different forms and complexions of men do. But if the inhabitants of the world in no other way diſcover themſelves to be of the ſame race, yet they ſufficiently diſcover it, in their hearts and lives.

It is true, ſin is eſſentially the ſame in all beings. It is the ſame in fallen angels and in fallen men.

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The fallen angels, it is probable, from their being incorporeal, are incapable of ſome external acts of wickedneſs, which men commit while in the body, and which they will be incapable of committing, when they are abſent from it, in a future world. But ſtill the nature of ſin will remain the ſame there as here. In this world, ſin has ever been the ſame. In every age, and in every part of the world, it has manifeſted itſelf much in the ſame way. Different vices may have more eſpecially prevailed in different times and places among mankind; but the ſame vices, the ſame acts of wickedneſs, are found now among us, which were found in the early ages of the world, and have been found in every age ſince. From hence too we ſee, that human nature is the ſame now, that it was near ſix thouſand years ago. Cuſtoms and manners may vary in various ages. Men may make improvements in knowledge; nations may be civilized, who were once barbarous and ignorant; ſtill human nature remains the ſame. Though the fatal poiſon of ſin has been tranſmitted from age to age, and has paſſed through ſo many millions of millions of mankind; yet its fatal malignity does not appear to be in the leaſt abated, nor the quantity of it diminiſhed. And notwithſtanding all that has been done to deſtroy the works of the devil, he ſtill reigns in every heart, until Chriſt comes by his Spirit, and takes poſſeſſion of it for himſelf. Mankind are now, by nature, juſt the ſame wicked creatures, which they would have been,

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had there been no Savior provided for them. Hence we may add as a further inference,

3. That mankind do not grow weary of ſin, by continuing in it; nor become more diſpoſed to forſake it, by ſeeing and feeling the evil effects of it.

Such is the nature of human depravity, and ſuch the influence of it upon the human mind, that though men ſee and know the evil of ſin, and complain of its bitter effects and conſequences; yet they are not, on this account, at all diſpoſed to forſake it. Though we know, that ſin has produced a long train of calamities in this world; though we know, that it has ſwept off whole generations and nations of men from the face of the earth; and though we have all poſſible evidence, that it has plunged millions of mankind into endleſs miſery; yet we are no more afraid of ſin now, than mankind were five thouſand years ago. Men love ſin now as much as they did then. And even the ſame perſon, who has for many years lived a life of ſin and wickedneſs, is not, on this account, any more diſpoſed to forſake it, but, on the contrary, much more hardened in it. Such is the ſcripture repreſentation of the matter. "Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the Leopard his ſpots? Then may ye alſo do good, that are accuſtomed to do evil." And ſuch is the truth of fact. We ſee individuals grow more and more hardened in ſin, the longer they continue in it. And though they feel the ſad effects of their folly, yet they are no more

diſpoſed

diſpoſed to forſake it. The drunkard will not reform, though he feels the fatal effects of his vice. The thief will not ceaſe to ſteal, though he be detected and puniſhed for his crime. Indeed, we ſometimes ſee, though very rarely, a man forſaking ſome particular vice, becauſe he finds it will ruin him, if he does not; but generally, when men forſake any particular way of ſinning, it is becauſe it agrees not with a change in their circumſtances, or condition of life. In this caſe, they commonly exchange one vice for another, which is more convenient. But even when age, or bodily infirmity, incapacitates a man for the indulgence of any particular ſin, he commonly diſcovers the ſame love to wickedneſs, though not the ſame ability to act it out. Suffering the evil conſequences of ſin, may lead men to hate them and guard againſt them; while yet the heart remains as ſinful as ever. Nor did ſuffering for ſin, ever yet, of itſelf, lead a man to hate ſin itſelf, on account of the moral evil of it. Indeed, it is eaſy to ſee, that if a man forſakes any vicious practice, merely becauſe he feels the ill effects of it, this has nothing of the nature of true repentance for ſin, or hatred of it. This he may do from the very ſame principle, which leads another to continue in ſin, that is, perſonal and preſent pleaſure, comfort, or happineſs. Hence it appears, that there is no foundation for the opinion of ſome, that the future puniſhment of hell will bring men to repentance, and lead them

to hate sin and forsake it. On the contrary, there is reason to believe, that their punishment will tend only to exasperate them the more against God. Besides, whatever the nature and tendency of divine judgments in this world may be, it appears, that the punishment of sinners in another world, is not designed as a discipline to reform them, but as a manifestation of the divine displeasure against them forever. Again,

4. It appears, that mankind are strongly and fatally resolved on sin, and determined to continue in it.

If mankind were not very strongly set in wickedness and resolved to continue in it, surely the world would have been, at least in some measure, reformed and amended before now, by the various methods which have been used for that purpose. How many means does God now use to reform the world, and what various methods does he now take to reclaim sinners, without producing any salutary effect! Can you, my friends, imagine, that it would be possible for sinners to oppose and resist all the means of grace, and continue secure in sin, if they were not resolved and determined to continue in it? Why do not you, with all your heart, reject sin, and resolve never more to have any thing to do with this dreadful evil? Why do you not hate it, and watch, and pray, and strive, with all your might, against it? The truth is, your hearts are under the full power and dominion of it; you

hold

hold it faſt, and refuſe to let it go. But, probably you will ſay, We are certainly not determined to continue in it; nay, we are determined we will, by and by, forſake it. Fatal deception! Are you not determined to continue, at leaſt a little longer? The very ſaying that you are reſolved, hereafter, to forſake it, is ſaying that you are reſolved, at preſent, to continue in it. If you form any reſolution at all about it now, it muſt be either to forſake it now, or to continue in it now. And the diſpoſition to put off your reformation to a more convenient ſeaſon, is a preſent reſolution not to forſake ſin. You muſt own, therefore, that you are, at preſent, fixed and reſolved to continue in your enmity and oppoſition to God. Hence we are led to reflect,

5. That there muſt be a divine power to ſubdue and deſtroy ſin in the human heart.

Nothing but the almighty power of God can reform and reclaim the world, and bring men back from the paths of ſin. External means are in themſelves ineffectual. The means which God himſelf has inſtituted, and which he has made uſe of, are in themſelves ineffectual. They will do nothing, unleſs accompanied with his divine power. What means has God been uſing, ever ſince the fall of man? And what effect have thoſe means had? The world in general remains as wicked as ever. It is true, indeed, means have been effectual in many inſtances. Millions and millions have, at one time and another, been reclaimed, and brought

home

home to God. But, in all thoſe inſtances, the means uſed have been accompanied with a ſpecial divine influence. Men are made willing only in the day of God's power. This is agreeable to the whole tenor of ſacred Scripture, which always aſcribes the converſion of a ſinner to the power of the Deity, even to that power, which was exerted in raiſing Chriſt from the dead.

6. We learn how great the patience, forbearance, and long ſuffering of God, towards ſinners of mankind, has been and ſtill is.

Is it not juſtly ſurpriſing, that God has ſo long borne with this wicked world, which has all the time lain in wickedneſs? How many enemies has he had here! How obſtinately have they oppoſed all the means, which he has uſed to reclaim them! How greatly have they abuſed and provoked him! And yet he has endured them with much long ſuffering. Surely he has with propriety ſaid, that he is ſlow to anger, gracious and merciful, abundant in goodneſs. He is indeed a long ſuffering God, and waits to be gracious to the moſt unworthy and ill deſerving creatures. But if, notwithſtanding all his patience and long ſuffering, they will lie in wickedneſs, then,

7. The time muſt and will come, when he will deſtroy the world.

It is inconſiſtent to ſuppoſe, that God will always uphold this ſinful world, and continue to bring into exiſtence a race of rebellious creatures. This

would

would be to act out of character, and even to contradict his word. The awful judgments, which he has already inflicted upon the world, are a prelude of its future and final deſtruction. Beſides, he has plainly and expreſsly told us, that this world ſhall be burnt up, that it is reſerved unto fire, againſt the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men. O! let us remember, therefore, who, and what, and where we are. We are now inhabitants of a world, which lieth in wickedneſs. We belong to a race of fallen, periſhing creatures. And, unleſs we come out from this ſinful world, we muſt ſink down into endleſs miſery. We juſtly deſerve this miſery; but God yet invites us to turn and live. Let us immediately forſake all our evil ways and thoughts, and turn unto the Lord, who will have mercy upon us, and to our God, who will abundantly pardon.

SERMON.

SERMON V.

Conformity to God the Eſſence of True Religion.

MATTHEW, v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

TO every one, who believes the being of God, and the reality and importance of religion, it muſt be an intereſting inquiry, What is true religion? Or wherein does it conſiſt? The importance of rightly determining this queſtion appears, not only from conſidering, that it is the almoſt unanimous opinion of all mankind, in every age and every nation, that ſome religion is neceſſary; but alſo from the very different ideas of mankind concerning religion. Almoſt all nations differ from one another in the modes and forms of religion, if not in their ideas of the nature of religion. And among the reformed chriſtian nations, what a diverſity of modes and forms are to be found among the ſame people? There is not, perhaps,

a nation or people on earth, among whom there is a greater variety of religions, or outward modes and forms of religion, than among the inhabitants of this American land. And it is but too much the caſe, that each ſect is diſpoſed to confine pure and undefiled religion to thoſe of its own denomination; or, at leaſt, to imagine that they come neareſt to perfection in it. In this view, therefore, the inquiry appears ſtill more important, What is true religion? Or wherein does it conſiſt? To determine this important queſtion, we muſt have recourſe to the word of God: *There*, undoubtedly, true religion is delineated. To this, however, all profeſſing chriſtians reſort, and *there* imagine they find the particularities of their reſpective denominations. But our preſent inquiry is not concerning the outward modes and forms of religion; but concerning the real nature and eſſence of it. For though there be a right and a wrong, reſpecting modes and forms; yet there may be, and doubtleſs are, ſome who hold to different modes and forms, who will, notwithſtanding, agree in the real nature of religion. For however many the modes and forms may be, which conſiſt with true religion; yet religion itſelf is but one and the ſame thing, wherever it is found.

Religion is eſſentially the ſame thing in angels, in ſaints above, and in men on earth; yea, if there be myriads of worlds peopled with intelligent beings of different capacities, and yet moral agents,

capable

capable of religion, religion is essentially the same in them all. Nay more, religion is the same in God, and in all rational creatures; for religion in the creature consists in its conformity to God. We do not indeed speak of the religion of God, because, when we speak of religion, we speak of that in the creature, which is its conformity to God; or the exercises of heart, which the creature feels towa rds God. But, so far as these exercises of heart, in the creature, towards God, are truly religious, they are conformable to God, and constitute the creature's resemblance of God. This, we trust, will be made to appear, in the important subject before us, which is designed to exhibit the nature of true religion, from the passage just read: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." These words evidently inculcate on us a conformity to God, and the highest possible resemblance of him; and therefore naturally lead us to this observation, viz.

That religion consists in a conformity to God, in the inward exercises of our hearts, and in all the outward actions of our lives.

To set this truth in the clearest possible point of light, it will be necessary to make the following observations.

1. God is an infinitely perfect being. This is certainly supposed, if not expressed, in the text. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The perfection of God is here set up as the standard of all perfection,

which the creature is directed to copy after and endeavor to imitate. And reaſon as well as revelation teaches us, that God is an infinitely perfect being; that the higheſt poſſible perfection dwells in him; that he is perfect, to ſuch a degree as no other being is or can poſſibly be. All the perfection of created beings is derived from him, and dependent on him, and therefore cannot, in degree, equal the perfection of God. And the perfection of God conſiſts in his goodneſs, in the infinite benevolence of his nature. Indeed all the natural and moral attributes of the Deity are neceſſary, to conſtitute the perfection of the divine character; but yet the perfection of the whole is completed by divine benevolence. Love is the ſum of all moral beauty and excellence. The infinite purity, holineſs, juſtice, and wiſdom of the Deity, are only love in perfection. God is, therefore, infinitely perfect, becauſe he is infinitely glorious in goodneſs. Hence,

2. The more any rational creature reſembles God, the more perfect that creature is. This is a neceſſary conſequence of the former obſervation. For, if God be infinitely perfect, if he be the ſum and ſtandard of moral excellence and perfection; then the more any creature reſembles God, and the greater his conformity to God is, the more excellent and perfect a creature he is. And if the glory of the divine perfection conſiſts in divine love and benevolence, then the glory, the honor, the dignity, and perfection, of every rational creature,

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muſt alſo conſiſt in the benevolence of that creature: Or in the meaſure and degree in which he feels and acts out the ſpirit of true benevolence. Furthermore,

3. As God is a being of ſuch infinite perfection, of ſuch infinite benevolence and love, he muſt be pleaſed with that in the creature, which moſt reſembles himſelf; not only becauſe it appears rational for every being to love itſelf, and that which reſembles itſelf; but becauſe it is neceſſary to the very eſſence of benevolence, to delight in benevolence, and in its greateſt and moſt extenſive ſpread and prevalence. For this reaſon, God, as an infinitely perfect and benevolent being, muſt be moſt pleaſed with the benevolence of his creatures; for in this they moſt of all reſemble himſelf. Indeed, if we could make the ſuppoſition, that there were ſome kind of imperfection in God, in ſome other reſpects, and yet ſuppoſe him perfect in love; he would then be moſt pleaſed with that creature, which reſembled him moſt in this benevolent ſpirit; for this is the faireſt and brighteſt feature in his character. Hence there is nothing, which can be more pleaſing to God, than the prevalence of the higheſt degree of benevolence and love; and nothing can be more pleaſing to him in the creature, than its reſemblance of himſelf in the perfection of love. For the ſame reaſon,

4. He muſt, if he require any thing, require this of thoſe, who are capable of reſembling him. If

God be such an infinitely perfect being, if he be so full of pure benevolence, and if he rejoice most of all in this resemblance of himself in his creatures; then he must use that authority, which he has over his creatures, in enjoining upon them a conformity to himself herein. If God have any authority over his creatures, any right to command them, (which none will deny;) then we might reasonably suppose, that he would require what was most agreeable to himself, and that in which they would most of all resemble him. Not to do this would argue imperfection in his character. But this he has done, as we shall find hereafter. These things being premised, we may now proceed more directly to the point, and show, that a conformity to God, in the inward exercises of our hearts, and in all the outward actions of our lives, is what constitutes true religion. And therefore I add,

5. That when God made man at first, he made him in his own image, conformed to himself in moral purity, holiness and love. We are particularly informed, that, when God made man, he created him after his own image. When God was about to create man, he said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And when he was created, it is said, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them." Again it is said, "In the likeness of God made he him." But in what did this image or likeness to God consist? Not in the form

form of his body, or features of his face; for God is a ſpirit: Not particularly in the natural powers and capacities of his ſoul; but in the moral rectitude, purity, and holineſs of his heart. Hence Solomon tells us, that "God made man upright," *i. e.* in moral rectitude. The glory of God's character conſiſts in his benevolence; hence, when God, at the requeſt of Moſes, would ſhew him his glory, he cauſed all his *goodneſs* to paſs before him. That the image of God, in which man was firſt created, conſiſted in his moral purity and holineſs, in the conformity of his heart to God, in the exerciſes of real love and benevolence, is evident from man's being recovered to this image of God in regeneration. In this change, he is born again; created anew in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works; and renewed after the image of him who created him. It is abundantly evident, from the whole tenor of ſacred Scripture, that the honor and dignity, the glory and felicity, of man's primitive ſtate, conſiſted in his perfect and entire conformity to God, in the inward exerciſes of his heart. Man was then, in his meaſure and degree, perfect as his Father in heaven was perfect; *i. e.* there was no kind or degree of contrariety or oppoſition in his heart to God. He loved God with all his heart; he loved the ſame things which God loved; he hated the ſame things which God hated; though his nature and capacities were ſuch, that he could not love in the ſame degree. But his heart was in perfect union and harmo-

ny with God; and in this consisted the image of God, in which man was first created. This was his religion, and this is the religion of every rational being, whether angel, or man, as will more fully appear in this discourse. Again,

6. That religion consists in a conformity of heart to God, a conformity to his moral image, or in the acts and exercises of our hearts, is further evident from this consideration, that the great design of man's redemption by Christ, is to recover man to this image of God. The great design of God, in the redemption of fallen man, was not merely nor principally to save mankind from wrath, not especially to save him from misery; but to recover him to the moral image of God. Hence it is said, that Christ was manifested to take away, or put away, sin, by the sacrifice of himself; to destroy the works of the devil; to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. It is abundantly evident, from the whole complexion of the Bible, that the great end and design of this, which may in a sense be said to be the greatest of all God's works, the work of redemption, was to bring man back to God, from whom he had revolted; to recover him from the love of sin, to a love of holiness; to recover him from a state of enmity and opposition to God, to a state of reconciliation and peace with him. Hence Christ is said to have made peace, through the blood of his cross; and the redeemed from among

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men in heaven, are repreſented as praiſing Chriſt, that he has redeemed them to God by his blood. Nothing can be more evident to any one really acquainted with the Bible than this; that the great deſign of man's redemption was, not to purchaſe for him a liberty to continue in a ſtate of enmity and oppoſition to God; but, to recover him to a ſtate of cordial reconciliation to God, to a ſtate of union, harmony and peace with him. As the redemption of mankind by Chriſt is a manifeſtation of the infinite love and benevolence of the Deity; ſo it is deſigned to promote and increaſe the greateſt love and benevolence among the creatures of God, and to excite the moſt ardent love in themſelves towards God. And this effect it does and will have upon all thoſe, who comply with and feel the genuine influence of it. We may obſerve,

7. That religion conſiſts in a conformity of heart to God, is evident from this; that it is the work and office of the Holy Ghoſt in the economy of man's redemption and ſalvation, to renew the ſoul after the image of God, and to recover mankind to a Godlike ſpirit and temper. Man having, by ſin, loſt the moral image of God, being alienated from God, and become oppoſed to him in the temper and diſpoſition of his mind, or in the inward exerciſes of his heart, it was neceſſary that he ſhould become reconciled to God, in order to his enjoying eternal life and happineſs. Hence there muſt not only be atonement made for ſin, by the ſuffer-

ings and death of Chriſt, in order to ſupport the honor and dignity of the divine law and government; but alſo the fallen ſinner muſt be recovered to the moral image of God. The power and dominion of ſin muſt be deſtroyed in his heart; all the contrariety and oppoſition of his heart muſt be removed; and he muſt become the cordial friend of God. Without this, God can never become reconciled to him, nor become his friend. Notwithſtanding all the atonement made for ſin, and reparation done to his injured law and government, it is impoſſible for God to become reconciled to the ſinner, whoſe heart is oppoſed to him. God cannot become reconciled to ſin, unleſs he deny himſelf, and act contrary to his own nature; nor to the ſinner as ſuch. There can be no friendſhip in God towards a creature oppoſed to him; but he is angry with the wicked every day. Hence, when God laid the plan of man's redemption, it was not only concerted, that Chriſt ſhould die to make atonement for ſin, but alſo that the Holy Ghoſt ſhould renew, ſanctify, and recover the redeemed from the power and dominion of ſin, and reſtore them to the moral image of God. This change, wrought in the heart of the redeemed by the Spirit of God, is ſo great, and makes ſuch an alteration in him, that he is ſaid to be a new creature, old things are done away, behold all things are become new. And it is alſo called a new birth, or being born again. Hence Chriſt has ſaid, and ſaid it with

with the utmoſt ſolemnity, "Verily, verily, except a man be born again, born from above, born of God, born of the Spirit, he cannot ſee the kingdom of God." And all thoſe who are indeed intereſted in the redemption wrought out by Chriſt, are thus renewed by the Spirit of God; and beholding as in a glaſs the glory of the Lord, are changed into the ſame image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. They are renewed after the image of him who created them, and have the ſpirit of God dwelling in them. The law of the Spirit of life in Chriſt Jeſus hath made them free from the law of ſin and death. They are waſhed, they are ſanctified, they are juſtified in the name of the Lord Jeſus, and by the Spirit of our God. Ye are not in the fleſh, ſays St. Paul to the Romans, but in the ſpirit, if ſo be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the ſpirit of Chriſt he is none of his; *i. e.* if any man have not the ſame temper and diſpoſition, which Chriſt poſſeſſed; if he have not the ſame or like heart; if he be not conformed to Chriſt in the exerciſes of his heart, he is not a chriſtian. Hence it is, that real chriſtians are ſaid to be united to Chriſt, and to become one with him; becauſe they are like to Chriſt in the temper and diſpoſition of their hearts. They have the ſame mind in them, which was alſo in Chriſt Jeſus; and he was one with the Father, not only in his divinity, but in all the exerciſes of his heart. Chriſtians are alſo call-

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ed the children of God ; becauſe, as the child bears the natural image or reſemblance of his earthly parents, ſo the real chriſtian, or child of God, bears the moral or ſpiritual image of his heavenly Father. The apoſtle to the Galatians ſays, " And becauſe ye are ſons, God hath ſent forth the ſpirit of his Son into your hearts." There is ſuch an union of affection and ſimilarity of ſpirit, between Chriſt and believers, that the apoſtle, in another place, calls them the members of his body, of his fleſh, and of his bones. In a word, it is evident, that God hath from the beginning choſen believers to ſalvation, through ſanctification of the ſpirit, and belief of the truth ; therefore he ſaves them, by the waſhing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghoſt, which he ſheds on them abundantly, through Chriſt Jeſus our Lord. And hereby all chriſtians may know that God dwelleth in them, and they in him, becauſe he hath given them of his ſpirit. At preſent, I obſerve only once more,

8. That true religion conſiſts in a conformity of heart to God, is evident from this conſideration ; that the perfection of the heavenly ſtate conſiſts in a perfect conformity to God. That the perfection of the heavenly ſtate does conſiſt in a perfect conformity to God, is abundantly evident, from the repreſentations which the ſcriptures give us of that ſtate. " Behold, ſays the apoſtle John, now are we the ſons of God ; and it doth not yet appear what

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we ſhall be; but *we know* that when he ſhall appear we ſhall be *like him*, for we ſhall ſee him as he is." "Then ſhall I be ſatisfied, ſays the Pſalmiſt, when I awake with thy likeneſs." A perfect and entire conformity to God, in all the views and exerciſes of their ſouls, is that which conſtitutes the endleſs and inconceivable felicity of the celeſtial inhabitants. To view things in the ſame light, in which God views them; to feel towards every thing as God does; and to act as God acts, ſo far as the creature is capable; this conſtitutes the perfection and the happineſs of heaven. Hence, it is clearly evident, that true religion muſt conſiſt in a conformity of heart to God; or in having the ſame holy and benevolent exerciſes which God has. And in proportion as we are conformed to the moral image of God, in the ſame proportion we are truly religious, and no farther.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

Conformity to God the Eſſence of True Religion.

MATTHEW, v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

OF all the vaſt variety of creatures that inhabit this world, whether on the earth, in the earth, in the air, or in the ſeas, man alone was made after the image of God. And as he alone is capable of bearing the moral image of his Maker, ſo he alone is capable of true religion; which conſiſts in a conformity of heart to the Deity; in a reſemblance of him, in the inward temper and diſpoſition of the mind, or in the moral exerciſes of the heart. This important truth we attempted to illuſtrate and confirm in the preceding diſcourſe, by a variety of conſiderations, which we ſuppoſed made it evident, that true religion does eſſentially conſiſt in a conformity of heart to God. But it

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may be considered as an objection to this, that there are certain duties enjoined on us, which require such exercises of heart, as it is impossible that God should ever feel; and therefore religion in the creature must, in many respects, be essentially different from a conformity of heart to God. But, from a careful attention to the various duties enjoined upon us in the word of God, it will appear, that they all naturally arise and flow from a heart conformed to the moral image of God, or from a spirit and temper like that which God possesses. Hence I would further add,

9. That true religion essentially consists in a conformity of heart to God, appears from attending to the duties, which God has particularly inculcated on us in his word. Any one, who pays a careful attention to his Bible, must be convinced, that the religion there taught and inculcated, essentially consists in those holy exercises of heart, which God himself feels, and which constitute the perfection and glory of the divine character. But, before we attend to any particular duties, it may not be amiss to observe, that there are some general and comprehensive injunctions, inclusive of all religion, which particularly require a conformity of heart to God. Thus in the text; "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Without mentioning any one attribute or perfection of the Deity, which we are to copy after, the injunction is, to resemble God in

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all the moral attributes and perfections of his nature, ſo far as human nature will admit. Or if any thing in particular be intended, in which we are to imitate and reſemble God, it is unqueſtionably in that univerſal and diſintereſted love and benevolence, mentioned in ſome preceding verſes; or that love to our enemies, which God manifeſts towards his enemies.

We have alſo this general injunction: "Ye ſhall be holy: For I the Lord your God am holy." Here the holineſs of God is given as a reaſon why we ſhould be holy; and we are required to be conformed to God in the holineſs of his nature. Holineſs is eſſentially the ſame in all beings; in God, in angels, in ſaints in heaven, and in ſaints on earth. Holineſs is moral rectitude, a conformity to perfect goodneſs; or, in other words, it is the perfection of benevolence or love. To be holy, therefore, as God is holy, is to be wholly under the influence of real love. All the moral exerciſes of heart, which God has enjoined upon us, are either directly ſuch as God himſelf has; or they are the natural fruit and effect of ſuch exerciſes, in ſuch creatures as we are. Let us now pay a particular attention to ſome of the principal duties, or moral exerciſes of heart, which God has enjoined upon us.

And here I may well begin where God himſelf begins, and ſay, "The firſt of all the commandments is, Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all

all thy heart," &c. Nothing is more evident, than that this command directly and immediately requires a conformity of heart to God. God is love; his nature, his effence is love—all his ways and works are ways and works of love. Love, as we have repeatedly obſerved, is the perfection of God's moral character; it is this which makes him holy; it is this which renders him infinitely glorious. And becauſe he is ſuch an infinitely glorious and perfect being, therefore he loves himſelf infinitely more than every thing elſe. And he thus loves himſelf, not becauſe, (if I may be allowed the expreſſion) not becauſe it is himſelf; but becauſe it is infinite perfection, infinite goodneſs, that he loves. Hence he loves every other being as he loves himſelf, ſo far forth as that being reſembles himſelf, or is perfect, holy, and good. And was it poſſible that there ſhould be any other being equally perfect with himſelf, he would love that being as himſelf, or *equally* with himſelf. And, therefore, when he requires us to love him with all the heart, he requires us to feel, as far as our nature will admit, as he himſelf does; or to love ſupreme excellence with ſupreme affection. He does not require us to love him from ſelfiſh, mercenary motives, becauſe we imagine he loves us, or becauſe he has been good and kind to us; but to love him for what he is in himſelf. This love to God ariſes and flows from a clear view and lively ſenſe of the infinite glory and perfection of the divine nature. And when we love

God, becauſe he is ſupremely good, or becauſe he is abſolutely perfect, then we are conformed to God, and love him as he loves himſelf.

Hence we ſee the propriety of Chriſt's ſaying, that the ſecond commandment is like to the firſt, viz. "Thou ſhalt love thy neighbor as thyſelf." For this love of our neighbor flows from the ſame benevolent ſource from which love to God flows. When we love our neighbor as ourſelves, we then only act as God does, who loves all his creatures, and that in proportion to their moral excellence, and real importance. We are to love our neighbor as ourſelves, becauſe he is of the ſame nature with us, and with us ſhares in the ſame love of God. "On theſe two commandments, ſays Chriſt, hang all the law and the prophets." And Paul ſays, that "love is the fulfilling of the law." All the requirements of the law, and even all goſpel duties, are compriſed in ſuch love as we have conſidered. An heart under the perfect influence of this love, will feel all thoſe other exerciſes, and perform all thoſe other duties, which the word of God inculcates. Thus the heart, poſſeſſed of this true love and diſintereſted affection, will love its enemies. For the good man loves God, not for what he is to him in particular, but for what he is in himſelf. He loves his neighbor, not for the good which he receives from him, but becauſe he is a fellow creature, and ſhares with him the love of God. And he loves

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his enemy, not as an enemy, but as a man, as a fellow candidate for eternity. In all these instances, he resembles the Deity. Hence St. John says, "He that loveth is born of God; and he that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him: He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." It is evident, therefore, that a conformity of heart to God in love, is the highest perfection of human nature, and therefore must be the sum of all religion. When the soul is thus conformed to the moral image of God, and loves him with a supreme and ardent affection, then it will naturally and necessarily deny itself; its own interests and concerns will appear to be nothing, in comparison with the interests of God's kingdom; it will sink into nothing before God, and desire to live only to him, and for his honor and glory. When the christian feels such a spirit and temper as this, it is evident, that he is then conformed to the moral image of God, and acts in some measure as God does, who prefers and seeks his own glory as the ultimate end of all his conduct. It will be difficult to attend particularly to every duty enjoined upon us by God in his word, and show how they are all only a conformity of heart and life to God. However, I cannot omit just mentioning a number.

Does God require of us universal righteousness? This is but to be conformed to God, who is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. Does

God require of us ſtrict juſtice, in all our dealings with each other? This is but an expreſſion of real love and benevolence, and a conformity to him, who is a juſt God and Savior, and the habitation of whoſe throne is juſtice and judgment. Does God enjoin truth and faithfulneſs upon us? This is but an expreſſion of love, and a reſemblance of him, whoſe character is that of faithful and true. Does God require us to do good to all, as we have opportunity? This is only to act out benevolence, and to imitate him, who is good unto all, and whoſe tender mercies are over all his works. Does God require us to love our enemies, to bleſs them that curſe us, and to do good to them that hate us? This is only the fruit and effect of a benevolent heart, and a conformity to him, who is ſlow to anger, who waits to be gracious, and who is ready to forgive. I might proceed to mention all the chriſtian graces and virtues, and ſhow that they are all but ſo many particulars of conformity to God, that infinitely perfect and glorious being.

But it may ſtill be ſaid, are there not ſome duties inculcated, which do not imply, or which are not expreſſive of a conformity of heart to God? *e. g.* Repentance is an important duty for ſuch guilty creatures as we are. But what conformity is there in this, to God? Surely God does not repent of his conduct. True, God can never exerciſe or feel repentance; and yet repentance for

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ſin, in the truly good man, ariſes and flows from his preſent conformity to God in the temper of his heart; and never yet did any man exerciſe true repentance for ſin, until his heart was renewed after the image of God, and filled with love to him. Repentance for ſin flows not from fear, but from love; not from a dread of divine wrath, but from a view of the infinite glory and perfection of God, and a ſenſe of the exceeding evil of ſin, as committed againſt ſuch a being. In the exerciſe of true repentance, the ſoul has, in ſome meaſure, the ſame views of the evil of ſin, that God has, and hates it, in ſome meaſure, as God does; and therefore the more humble and penitent the heart is, the more it is conformed to God in love; in love of him, of his law and government. Hence, the true penitent always loves a holy God, and deſires to ſee his law magnified, his government ſupported, and his character diſplayed. And all his exerciſes of holy deſires; his aſcriptions of praiſe to God; his confeſſions and humiliations; his petitions and requeſts; and his interceſſions for mankind, for the church of Chriſt, and for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, as far as they partake of the nature of true religion, and are real acts of duty, ſo far they flow from a heart conformed to God, from love to him, and a deſire of his honor and glory. And when the ſoul feels moſt entirely reſigned and ſubmiſſive to the will of God, and does as it were go entirely out of

itſelf, and refer every thing to the ſovereign diſpoſal of the Deity ; then it is moſt of all conformed to the moral image of God. Then it feels as Chriſt did, who was the brightneſs of his Father's glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon. He ſaid, " I delight to do thy will, O my God ; yea, thy law is within my heart." And again he ſaid, in a time of the greateſt poſſible trial, " Father, not my will but thine be done." On the whole, is it not abundantly evident, that true religion conſiſts in a conformity of heart to God ? In the ſame moral exerciſes ; in the ſame holy and benevolent feelings which God has ? In the ſame proportion as we are conformed to God, and feel and act like him ; in the ſame proportion we are truly religious, and perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.

I now proceed to improve the ſubject.

1. If true religion conſiſts in a conformity of heart to God ; if it conſiſts in the heart's being united to him, and having the ſame holy exerciſes which God has ; then we learn the nature and importance of that change, which the ſcriptures make neceſſary, in order to the enjoyment of God in heaven ; or the nature and importance of regeneration. Much has been ſaid, and various have been the opinions of mankind, reſpecting the nature and importance of regeneration ; but without attending to theſe, it is evident, that regeneration conſiſts in the change of the ſinner's heart, from a ſtate of enmity and oppoſition to God, to a ſtate of

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love and friendſhip for him ; or, it is the recovery of the ſoul to the moral image of God, which was loſt by the fall. And the importance of this change is obvious ; for there can be no true religion without this change, and previouſly to its being wrought. If regeneration does conſiſt in the recovery of the ſoul to the moral image of God, then the ſoul is naturally deſtitute of this moral image of the Deity ; and muſt remain ſo, until a work of regeneration is wrought in it. There may be, indeed, many external acts of duty, as they are commonly called, many outward acts which religion requires, and yet no religion in them, ſo long as the heart is deſtitute of the moral image of God. Conformity to God does not conſiſt in outward actions, but in inward moral exerciſes. Hence there is no true religion without theſe inward exerciſes, which are real conformity to God. There are many, we have reaſon to fear, in a goſpel land, who are ſo entirely ignorant of the nature of true religion, as to think that all religion conſiſts in certain external actions, that proceed from no higher than ſelfiſh affections, which are not only not conformed, but really oppoſed to God. True religion is a divine and heavenly principle, which leads the heart to God, and forms it into a reſemblance of the divine character. Hence it is that Chriſt ſays, "Except a man be born again, he cannot ſee the kingdom of God." And hence it is, that the apoſtle ſays, that "they that are in the fleſh,

that is, in a ſtate of unrenewed nature, cannot pleaſe God.

2. If true religion conſiſts in a conformity of heart to God; then there is a real, an inward, and eſſential difference, between ſaints and ſinners, or between thoſe who are chriſtians and thoſe who are not. And this difference does not conſiſt in the former's performing certain external actions, which the latter might; but it eſpecially conſiſts in the different temper and diſpoſition of their hearts, and the different motives from which they act. The real chriſtian acts from a principle of ſupreme love to God, in his external obedience to the divine commands; while the ſinner, in all his external obedience to God, acts only from love to himſelf, or from a ſupreme regard to his own happineſs. A man may be very ſtrict and exact in the performance of every outward duty; he may read and pray, attend public worſhip and divine ordinances—he may be morally honeſt and upright in his dealings—he may be kind and charitable to the poor—yea, he may be greatly engaged in his religion; and yet he may do all theſe things without any love to God, and conſequently without having the leaſt degree of true religion. The difference between ſuch an one and the real chriſtian is, that the former is actuated by a primary and ultimate regard to himſelf; while the latter, or the real chriſtian, is actuated by a ſupreme regard to God, and aims at his glory in all his religious duties; at leaſt,

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he does this so far as he is really religious. It is indeed a truth, that the real christian is sanctified but in part—he is but in part conformed to God—there is much sin and imperfection in him at all times, and he often feels and acts too much like the wicked man—but yet there is a real difference between them; the good man has something of the moral image of God on his heart, and is growing into a greater conformity to him, while the sinner has nothing of this, but is more and more alienated from God.

3. We learn from this discourse, why it is, that God loves the saint, and takes pleasure in him, while he is angry with the wicked, and condemns all his conduct. The reason is, because the saint bears his own moral image, and is in some measure conformed to him; whereas the sinner is opposed to God in the exercises of his heart, and will not become reconciled to his character. God cannot but love his own image, wherever he finds it. As a being of infinite benevolence and love, he must be pleased with the same benevolence and love in any of his intelligent creatures. He must be pleased with all their truly religious and benevolent exercises and actions. He must be pleased with their holy services, so far as they are holy. But as there is much sin and imperfection in them, it is only through Christ that they can be accepted. But as the wicked man is wholly destitute of the moral image of God, and utterly opposed to him;

him ; ſo God cannot be pleaſed with him, nor accept his pretended ſervices, but muſt be angry with him every day. As a being of infinite benevolence, he may love him as a creature capable of moral purity and holineſs, and yet hate him as a ſinner oppoſed to himſelf.

4. We further learn why holineſs of heart and life is required of all moral agents, and why this is required of believers under the goſpel, as much as ever it was under the law. The infinite perfection of God will not ſuffer him to allow and approve of ſin, in any creature capable of holineſs, capable of a conformity to his moral image. He muſt require all to love him with ſupreme affection : Not to do this would be to deny himſelf. Hence all rational creatures, angels, men, and devils, muſt be required, and muſt be under obligation, to love God, and be conformed to him. The chriſtian under the goſpel muſt, therefore, be under the ſame obligation to love God with all his heart, to be wholly conformed to God (which is holineſs of heart and life) as he would have been under the law. And though Chriſt has died to make atonement for ſin, to purchaſe pardon and eternal life for the believer ; yet he is under no leſs obligation to be perfectly holy, than he would have been, if there had been no Savior provided.

5. We learn what is the beſt and only ſure evidence of our being chriſtians indeed, and ſo of our title to eternal life. It is finding and feeling in

our

our hearts a conformity to God. Without a conformity to God, we cannot be admitted to heaven; we cannot enjoy God; we cannot be happy with him. The great inquiry then, is, am I conformed to God? Is my heart renewed after the image of God? Is the love of God ſhed abroad in my heart? Can I truly ſay, that I love God above every thing? That I love him for his own ſake; for his own infinite perfection, and not particularly for what he is to me, or has done for me? Do I prefer his honor and glory, to my own eaſe, comfort, or happineſs? Do I delight to do his will, and place my happineſs in adoring, praiſing, and ſerving him? Theſe are important inquiries, and may determine our character and ſtate. It is undoubtedly true, that, upon inquiring, every one will find much oppoſition to God, much pride, ſelfiſhneſs and wickedneſs in his heart, and even in his beſt ſervices; but yet, any real chriſtian may, perhaps, know, that he does love God ſupremely, and does deſire to live to his glory. And whoever knows this, may know, that he is a child of God, and an heir to the inheritance of the ſaints in light.

SERMON

SERMON VII.

The Benefit and Delight of drawing near to God.

PSALM lxxiii. 28.

But it is good for me to draw near to God.

IN the former part of this pſalm, David gives an account of the ſore temptation which he met with, to envy the proſperity of wicked men; to think hard of the ways of providence; and particularly to think, that there was no benefit or advantage to be derived from religion, from the fear and ſervice of God. He then proceeds to ſay how he overcame the temptation, and got rid of that ſevere conflict, which he had in his own mind; and that was by going into the houſe of God, by attending upon the public and inſtituted duties of the ſanctuary. "There, he ſays, he underſtood their end; then he ſaw, that, notwithſtanding their outward proſperity, they were in a truly wretched and miſerable condition; that they were ſtanding on ſlippery places, on the very

brink

brink of deſtruction, and in a moment ready to plunge into eternal miſery. Upon this juſt view of their caſe, he was ſurpriſed at his own ſtupidity and folly, in envying their condition. "So fooliſh was I, and ignorant, ſays he to God; I was as a beaſt before thee." But having overcome the temptation, and gotten deliverance from the ſore trial, he comes out of it like gold from the furnace, more purified and refined thereby. His love to God, and his reſolutions to adhere only to him, were more confirmed and eſtabliſhed than ever before. Among other ſenſible benefits, which he derived from the trial, this full conviction of heart was one: "It is good for me to draw near to God." Though once, in my haſte, I was ready to ſay, that there was no good to be gotten from religion, that I had cleanſed my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency; yet now I am of a different opinion; I know that it is good for me to draw near to God, and to live a life of communion with him. It is for my preſent comfort, and it will be for my everlaſting benefit. I am reſolved, whatever others may do, that I will keep near my God. And in this, every good man, who has once taſted that the Lord is gracious, will fully join with him, and ſay, "It is good for me to draw near to God." In treating the ſubject before us, I ſhall endeavor,

I. To ſhow what is intended, or implied, in drawing near to God.

II. Why

II. Why it is good, or in what ſenſe, and on what account, it is good thus to draw near to God.

I. Our firſt inquiry is, what is intended, or implied, in the expreſſion, *drawing near to God.*

Need I here obſerve, that drawing near to God is not a bodily, but a mental or ſpiritual exerciſe? Bodies may draw near to each other, by the power of gravitation or attraction; but nearneſs and diſtance, in ſuch caſes, have reſpect only to place. Whereas God is a ſpirit, and, in reference to place, is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being. He fills all places, and knows all things. As he is a ſpirit, ſo it is only the ſpirit or ſoul of man, that draws near to, or removes far from him. In the pſalm preceding the text, the Pſalmiſt ſays, "Lo, they that are far from thee ſhall periſh." By thoſe that are far from God, he undoubtedly means thoſe, whoſe affections are alienated from God; who have no love for God, no deſires after him, no delight in him, and no real acquaintance with him. Hence it is evident, that thoſe who are near to God, are thoſe who have placed their affections upon him, delight in him, and deſire to know and enjoy him. It is, therefore, only in and by the exerciſes of the heart, that we draw near to God. But as theſe inward affections or exerciſes of heart, are not only expreſſed by certain outward acts and duties, but many times awakened, quickened and excited thereby; ſo theſe outward or bodily acts and exerciſes

ercises are sometimes called drawing near to God. Hence we find God saying, "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me." Accordingly, attending upon the worship and ordinances, which God has appointed as means or mediums, in and by which his people may draw near to him, and the performance of prayer and other external duties, are considered and spoken of as drawing near unto God, and waiting upon him. Nor do I question whether the Psalmist, in the text, by the expression of drawing near to God, may intend waiting on God in his house, and attending upon the services of the sanctuary. And I am the more convinced that he means this *in particular*, from his mentioning the benefit that he had found from going into the sanctuary, where he learned the miserable end of those prosperous sinners, whose state he had so lately and so greatly envied. Drawing near to God may, therefore, imply,

1. Attending on the public worship and ordinances of God, and performing all those devotional exercises of prayer, praise, reading, hearing, and meditating on the word of God, which he has instituted and appointed, as means or mediums of communion with him.

Though God fills all places, and is excluded from none, yet he is said, in a special and peculiar sense, to dwell in his house or sanctuary, and to be

present

preſent in the public aſſembly of his ſaints. Hence, the place of public worſhip is uſually called the houſe of the Lord, or God's houſe. God ſays, "he loveth the *gates of Zion*, more than all the dwellings of Jacob." And of the ſanctuary he ſays, "This is my reſt, here will I dwell, for I have deſired it." And Chriſt has promiſed, that where but two or three are gathered together in his name, there he will be in the midſt of them. The divine preſence, therefore, in thoſe paſſages, means ſomething different from that eſſential preſence of God, which fills all places; it intends ſome ſpecial tokens or manifeſtations of himſelf. Hence the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks of the goings of God in his ſanctuary; as having ſeen him in that holy place. Now, as God is conſidered as being in a peculiar ſenſe preſent in his houſe, in public and ſolemn aſſemblies; ſo attending upon the public worſhip and ordinances of his houſe, is ſpoken of as drawing near to God. And it is in the ſerious and devout attendance upon the public worſhip and ordinances of his houſe, that pious ſouls do indeed draw near to God. Theſe are the inſtituted and appointed mediums of the ſoul's drawing near to him; therefore ſerve to awaken and excite, as well as to expreſs, thoſe holy exerciſes of heart, in which the ſoul has communion with God. For the ſame reaſon alſo, private meditation, prayer, and praiſe, may be called drawing near to God; for in theſe private and ſecret devotions, the ſoul often has acceſs to God

with

with confidence, and finds ſweet communion with him. But it is undoubtedly true, that many attend upon the worſhip and ordinances of God's houſe, and perform the external acts of prayer and praiſe in public, in private, and in ſecret, without ever really drawing near to God. Or, at moſt, they only draw near unto him with their mouth, and honor him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him. Such perſons muſt, of neceſſity, be ſtrangers to God, and to that delightful converſe and communion with him, which the ſaints enjoy. They know not what it is to have God drawing nigh to them, in reviving manifeſtations of himſelf, and communications of his grace to them. For this reaſon, they can hardly ſay, "It is good for me to draw near to God." Drawing near to God, therefore, muſt further imply,

2. The going forth of the heart in holy and devout exerciſes towards him; in love to him, delight in him, and deſires after him: Or, in the exerciſe of faith in him, repentance and humiliation before him, a hope in his mercy, an ardent, longing deſire after the enjoyment of him: Or, in a ſweet ſenſe of his love, in a lively ſenſe of his adorable attributes and perfections, in the delightful contemplation of them, and adoring and praiſing him for them: In the exerciſe of ſome one or more of theſe affections of the ſoul, the eſſence and excellency of drawing near to God conſiſts.

It is not always, perhaps not commonly the case, that *all* these affections are exercised, when the soul draws near to God, and has communion with him. At one time, one particular grace may be in the most lively and vigorous exercise, and may seem to swallow up the whole soul; at another time, another grace may have the ascendency. At one time, when the good man draws near to God, his heart may be so deeply affected with a sense of his sins, and of the evil of them, that he can hardly do, or say, or feel any thing, but lament and bewail his sins before God, and lie in sackcloth and ashes before him; he can only pour out his heart in most humble and penitent confessions. At another time, he feels so sensibly his need of the influences of the Divine Spirit, to direct him in duty, to lead and guide him, to strengthen and assist him, that his devotional exercises consist especially in fervent supplications and entreaties. At another time, his heart is swallowed up with delightful transporting views of the glory of God, and he scarcely does any thing but admire and adore him: Or with a sense of his love shed abroad in his heart, and then his most delightful exercise is thanksgiving and praise. Now, in all these pious and devotional exercises, the heart draws near to God. In the book of Psalms in particular, we find all these various acts and exercises expressed, sometimes one and sometimes another of them. The book of Psalms is different from all the other books of the Bible, being wholly

wholly made up of devotional acts and exercises, which express the feelings of the writers, at one time and another, and on various occasions. But, to return to our subject; drawing near to God is the soul's converse and communion with him. It is something between God and the soul, that resembles the intimate and endearing society and converse of particular friends, whose hearts are knit together in love, and who do, as it were, mutually interchange affections and hearts, with one another. In order, indeed, to this communion with God, it is necessary, not only that the soul draw near to God in those religious acts and exercises, mentioned above, but God also must draw near to such a soul, by the influences of his Holy Spirit. And this God is ever ready to do; for he is never backward to meet the soul; he has said, "Draw nigh to me, and I will draw nigh to you." Yea, when the holy soul does draw near to God, it is because God has prevented it by his goodness, or because God has first drawn near to the soul and drawn it unto him. "No man, says Christ, can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." The pious soul, sensible of its need of the drawings of the Spirit of God, says, "Draw me, we will run after thee?" The soul may, indeed, draw near to God, and yet not sensibly feel the sweet and refreshing presence of God; but, on the contrary, may complain with Job, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I

cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." And many a soul has complained of the hidings of his face, that is, of the want of sensible evidence and manifestation of the love of God; yet, at the same time, that soul does really enjoy the love and grace of God, in those desires after God, and those exercises of heart towards him, which are excited by God himself. The soul may sometimes be near to God, when it is mourning its distance from him, and in the midst of its mournful complaints, its tears of sorrow may be turned into songs of praise, by the unexpected manifestation of God's gracious presence. When this is the case, surely such a soul will be ready to say, "It is good for me to draw near to God." We proceed, then,

II. To consider why, or in what sense, or on what account, it is good thus to draw near to God.

The psalmist says, "It is good for me to draw near to God." He was convinced, that it was not only in general a good thing to draw near to God, but that is was good for himself personally to do it. Many are convinced, that religion is a good thing in general; it is good for the world, it is good for society, and it is good for every one but themselves. As for them, they have no relish for it, nor, at present, at least, any desire to practise it. But this was not the case with the psalmist. He was

convinced,

convinced, not only of its being a good thing in general, to draw near to God, but of its being good for him, in particular, to do it. He ſeems to ſpeak feelingly and experimentally, as one perſonally acquainted with it; *q. d.* Whatever others may think, and however they may act, though they may imagine that it is for their good to depart from God, and live a life of alienation from God; yet, for myſelf, I know that it is good *for me* to draw near to God, to wait upon him in his inſtituted worſhip and ordinances, and to maintain a conſtant communion with him. This was the opinion of the Pſalmiſt, and this is the opinion of every good man. But why is it good to draw near to God? I anſwer,

1. Becauſe there is a moral fitneſs, propriety, and beauty, in doing it.

It was not only the happineſs of man in his original ſtate, that he was allowed to draw near to God, and hold the moſt endearing and intimate communion with him; but the moral beauty and excellency of his ſoul conſiſted in its conformity to the image of God, in thoſe holy exerciſes of heart, which aſſimilated him to God, and brought him near to him. It is, therefore, an evidence, that the ſoul is renewed after the image of God, when it loves to draw near to him, and longs for intercourſe and communion with him. And there is a real goodneſs, a moral excellency, in drawing near to God; there is a beauty in it, pleaſing in

the view of angels, yea, pleaſing to God himſelf. Nothing can be more amiable than the ſoul's returning to God, exerciſing holy affections towards him, and reſting ſweetly on him. But as the Pſalmiſt ſaid, "It is good for me to draw near to God," he undoubtedly meant to expreſs the pleaſure and delight, which he took in doing this, and the benefit and advantage, which he derived from it. Therefore I obſerve,

2. It is pleaſing and delightful.

It affords the ſweeteſt joy, delight, and ſatisfaction, to the gracious ſoul. There is no pleaſure to be compared with this in this life. The nearer the ſoul gets to God, the greater and the ſweeter its joy and pleaſure. Nearneſs to God is what eſſentially conſtitutes the happineſs of heaven; to be in the immediate preſence of God, to behold the brighteſt diſplays of his glory, to enjoy the greateſt communications of his love, to have the ſoul wholly conformed to God, to be always full of holy affections towards God, and to be conſtantly employed in praiſing him; theſe things conſtitute the felicity of heaven, and in theſe things conſiſt a nearneſs to God. In proportion as theſe are found in the heart of a good man, in the ſame proportion is he near to God; and in the ſame proportion he is happy. It was this that made the Pſalmiſt ſay, "Bleſſed is the man whom thou chooſeſt, and cauſeſt to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy houſe." Hence, while many were inquiring,

Who

Who will ſhew us any good? he cries, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou haſt put gladneſs in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increaſed." The delight, which he found in drawing near to God, made him love the houſe of God ſo much, that he could ſay, in a rapture of joy, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hoſts! My ſoul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my fleſh crieth out for the living God." And again, "I was glad when they ſaid unto me, Let us go into the houſe of the Lord." And the reaſon why he had ſuch a love to the worſhip of God was, becauſe in it his ſoul drew near to God; he had communion with God, and this afforded him the greateſt pleaſure. Every one loves thoſe places and thoſe employments moſt, that afford him the greateſt pleaſure and delight. But the ſweeteſt moments, and the divineſt pleaſures, which the holy ſoul ever enjoys, are thoſe which it finds in drawing near to God. Hence it will ever ſay, "It is good for me to draw near to God." I might proceed to point out the advantages to be derived from drawing near to God; but as theſe are many and great, I cannot attend to them, in this diſcourſe, and, reſerving them for another opportunity, ſhall conclude, at preſent, with one reflection.

Does drawing near to God conſiſt, not in a bare attendance upon the worſhip and ordinances of

God, not in the bodily exercises of prayer and praise, but in the inward exercises of heart, expressed in and excited by those outward acts and exercises? Then let none of us content ourselves with a bare attendance upon, or performance of, those external acts and exercises, but see that our hearts draw near to God in them. The outward acts and exercises of religion are, by no means, to be despised or neglected; they are instituted by God, to serve valuable and important purposes; they often serve as means to lead the soul to communion with God. Hence they never will nor can be despised, by a gracious soul, but will be highly prized, greatly esteemed, and devoutly improved. But to rest in them, and to think, because we have observed the bare form of public, private, or secret prayer and praise, that we have done our duty, is a gross perversion of sacred things. It is not improving, but abusing the means of grace. It is not drawing near to God, in the proper sense; but abusing those sacred rights, which were designed to bring us near to God, not to satisfy and content us while estranged from him. But how often do men satisfy themselves with this! Are there not many, who know nothing about drawing near to God, only with their bodily presence? Are there not many, who wish or desire nothing more than this? And yet will not such profess to hope, yea, even to believe, that they shall be admitted into the immediate presence of God in heaven, and to a holy near-

neſs to him, when they leave this world? Vain hope! groundleſs faith! But can ſuch, indeed, hope for that heaven and that happineſs, which conſiſts in nearneſs to God, when they have no deſires after God now? No, it is not ſuch a heaven, it is not ſuch happineſs, that they deſire; and yet this is the only heaven, the only happineſs, prepared for rational and immortal ſouls. And the ſoul muſt be wrought to a fitneſs for heaven, before it can be admitted there; and in order to this, it muſt be formed to a love of God, to a delight in him, to a deſire of nearneſs to him. How, then, can you quiet yourſelves with mere bodily exerciſes, which profit nothing?

But is it not ſtill more ſtrange, that thoſe, who have ever taſted the pleaſure of drawing near to God, ſhould at any time quiet themſelves with attending upon, and performing external duties, without drawing near to God? And yet is not this ſometimes almoſt, if not wholly, the caſe, with many, if not all of us? How cold, lifeleſs, and formal, are many of our prayers, and other religious exerciſes! Do we not ſometimes come to, and go from the houſe of God, almoſt without any deſire of drawing near to him, in his worſhip and ordinances? Alas! my chriſtian friends! how unworthy is this of the character of thoſe, who have choſen God for their portion, and who place their happineſs in being near to him? Let us, then, more highly prize the means of drawing near to God; let us im-

prove

prove them better, and let us ſtir up our ſlothful ſouls to greater activity and fervor. Let us ſeek after a greater and more holy nearneſs to God, in his worſhip here, that we may be the better prepared to dwell in his preſence, and delight in his ſervice, hereafter.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

The Benefit and Delight of drawing near to God.

PSALM lxxiii. 28.

It is good for me to draw near to God.

HAPPY is the man, who, having found the ſupreme good, which he ought to ſeek after in this life, does cheerfully and ſteadily purſue it! Such an one may indeed obtain and enjoy great felicity. But it is unhappily the caſe, that moſt men overlook their own good, or miſtake the means of ſecuring it. They vainly imagine, that happineſs is to be had from thoſe objects and enjoyments, which can never afford it; though they are eager in the purſuit of it, yet they take the wrong road, and can never overtake it; they weary themſelves in vain; they ſpend their money for that which is not bread, and their labor for that which ſatisfieth not. To ſuch, Wiſdom crieth aloud, ſhe crieth without, ſhe uttereth her voice in the ſtreets; ſhe crieth in the chief place of concourſe, in the

opening

openings of the gate; in the city ſhe uttereth her words, ſaying, How long, ye ſimple ones, will ye love ſimplicity; and the ſcorners delight in ſcorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof. He, then, is truly wiſe, who hearkens to the voice of Wiſdom, and follows her guidance and direction; for ſhe will lead him, not into the enchanted fields of ſenſual pleaſure, but into the narrow way that leads to life. She will lead him unto God, even unto God his exceeding joy. And then ſhall he find, with the Pſalmiſt, that it is good for him to draw near to God.

What is implied in drawing near to God, we have particularly and largely conſidered, in the preceding diſcourſe. We began alſo to conſider, in what ſenſe, or on what account, it is good to draw near to God. We obſerved, in the firſt place, that it is good to draw near to God, becauſe there is a moral fitneſs, beauty, and propriety, in doing it: And, in the ſecond place, becauſe it affords the greateſt joy and delight, the ſweeteſt and nobleſt pleaſure. I proceed now to ſay,

3. It is good to draw near to God, becauſe it naturally produces the moſt deſirable effects upon the mind.

The benefits and advantages, which accrue to the ſoul, from drawing near to God, are many and great; they are almoſt too numerous to be particularly conſidered; but ſome of the moſt important, and which, perhaps, comprehend and include all others, are ſuch as theſe: It cures an envious ſpirit; it

quiets

quiets a murmuring ſpirit; it relieves the burden of an accuſing conſcience; it gives comfort and hope in adverſity; it adds to the joys of proſperity, and guards the heart againſt the danger of it; it produces calmneſs and ſerenity of mind at all times; particularly in the view and near approach of death; and it prepares the ſoul for heaven. Suffer me a little to illuſtrate each of theſe particulars, in order to excite you the more to a life of holy nearneſs to God.

Firſt, One particular benefit and advantage, ariſing from drawing near to God, is, that it cures an envious ſpirit.

I mention this firſt, becauſe it is particularly ſuggeſted by the text, and the occaſion of the Pſalmiſt's expreſſing himſelf thus in it. He particularly mentions his envious ſpirit, when he ſaw the proſperity of the wicked; and he tells us too how this ſpirit was cured, even by going into the ſanctuary of God, by drawing near to him in holy and devout exerciſes of religious worſhip. Then he ſaw how fooliſh and ſinful ſuch a ſpirit was, and condemned it, and himſelf for it, and reſolved in future to live near to God. The ſame benefit and advantage will every good man find from the ſame holy exerciſe. Envious feelings are too apt to ariſe in the hearts of the beſt of men, when they behold a wicked world in blooming proſperity around them. But at ſuch a time, a recourſe to God, a near and intimate communion with him, will immediately

diately ſubdue theſe envious feelings, and cauſe the heart to feel the vanity of the world, and its own infinitely ſuperior portion in God, and to ſay, as the Pſalmiſt does immediately after reſiſting his temptations: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on the earth that I deſire beſides thee!" When the ſoul does, indeed, draw near to God, and, eſpecially, if at the ſame time, God draws near to it, and gives it ſome lively manifeſtation of his love, it feels it has no reaſon to envy the richeſt monarch on earth, his crown, or his kingdom; for it has that, which far ſurpaſſes all that the world can beſtow. And as drawing near to God cures an envious ſpirit, ſo, for the ſame reaſon,

Secondly, It ſtills a murmuring, diſcontented ſpirit.

This is a ſpirit and temper very nearly reſembling the former, but it does not always ariſe from the ſame cauſe. An envious ſpirit may always imply or include a murmuring ſpirit; but a murmuring ſpirit does not always imply an envious ſpirit. Good men are many times apt to feel a murmuring, diſcontented ſpirit, not only from the view of the apparent greater proſperity of others, but alſo from troubles and difficulties which they feel, or apprehend, are coming on themſelves. They may be ready to think hard of the diſpenſations of Providence towards themſelves, and ſay, all theſe things are againſt them. But if, when hard thoughts ariſe in the mind, the ſoul betakes itſelf to God, and makes him its refuge, its murmurs are huſhed in

ſilence.

ſilence. Shall a man complain, a living man, for the puniſhment of his ſins? I will leave my complaint on myſelf, ſays ſuch an one, and with the pſalmiſt ſay, That thou mayeſt be juſtified when thou ſpeakeſt, and clear when thou judgeſt.

Thirdly, Drawing near to God relieves a guilty conſcience, and quiets its painful accuſations.

A guilty, accuſing conſcience is one of the greateſt and heavieſt burdens, that can be borne in this life; yea, it is ſometimes quite inſupportable. Hence Solomon has ſaid, "The ſpirit of a man will ſuſtain his infirmity; but a wounded ſpirit who can bear?" In what a lamentable and piteous caſe does the Pſalmiſt repreſent himſelf to be, on this account? "Thine arrows ſtick faſt in me, and thine hand preſſeth me ſore. There is no ſoundneſs in my fleſh, becauſe of thine anger; neither is there any ſoundneſs in my bones, becauſe of my ſin. Mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me." And in another place, he ſays, "When I kept ſilence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moiſture is turned into the drought of ſummer." The method which he took to gain relief in this deplorable condition, and the relief he gained, he informs us in the words following: "I acknowledged my ſin unto thee, and mine iniquities have I not hid; I ſaid, I will confeſs my tranſgreſſions unto the Lord; and thou forgaveſt the iniquity of

my

my ſins. For this ſhall every one that is godly pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayeſt be found." And what the Pſalmiſt here records of himſelf, has been experienced by moſt, if not all, good men. Nothing gives ſuch relief to a guilty conſcience, as drawing near to God, and pouring out the heart in humble, penitent confeſſion; drawing near in a way of true repentance, and faith in the blood of Chriſt. And as the good man is daily ſinning, he will find daily occaſion of drawing near to God, and derive daily relief from it. Indeed, nothing will keep the ſoul from ſin, like living near to God; and nothing will afford it relief, when it has departed from God, but returning to him again.

Fourthly, Drawing near to God gives comfort and hope in adverſity.

Adverſity is more or leſs the lot of all mankind in this life; good men are no more exempted from it, than others; for our Lord ſays to ſuch, "In the world ye ſhall have tribulation." The good man has many dark and gloomy days to experience, many and various temptations, trials, and troubles to endure; and had he not a God to go to, and was he not a God at hand, to whom he may at all times repair, he would be miſerable indeed. But in the midſt of the moſt gloomy and diſtreſſing ſcenes, let him, with faith and love, and holy confidence, go to God, and he finds hope, joy, comfort, and peace, beaming upon his ſoul. To the upright

right there ariſeth light in darkneſs. How do ſuch triumph in God in the moſt diſtreſſing day! "God is our refuge and ſtrength, a very preſent help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains are carried into the ſea." Nor is this a preſumptuous hope and confidence; for God has ſaid to every one that truſts in him, "Thou ſhalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the peſtilence that walketh in darkneſs, nor for the deſtruction that waſteth at noon day." As long as the ſoul keeps near to God, it can triumph over all oppoſition, it can conquer every enemy, it can endure every trial, it can rejoice even in tribulation, and ſing praiſe in the dungeon, though confined in the ſtocks, and loaded with irons. Again,

5. Another benefit and advantage of drawing near to God, and living near to him, is, that it adds to the joys of proſperity, and guards the heart againſt the dangers of it.

Proſperity is more dangerous to the ſoul than adverſity. The proſperity of fools ſhall deſtroy them. Hence the many cautions given to thoſe in proſperity. It particularly expoſes us to ſet our affections on the world, to grow unmindful of God, to neglect our ſouls; it tends to feed the pride of our hearts, and lead us to treat the poor with ſcorn and contempt; it is very apt to feed our luſts, and inflame our vanity. To prevent theſe things,

nothing will do but to keep the heart near to God. The ſoul that daily draws near to God, and has communion with him, will ſee the vanity of all theſe things, and therefore will not put confidence in them; but eſteem them as loſs and dung, in compariſon with the excellency of the knowledge of God in Chriſt. And while nearneſs to God takes off the heart from the world, it will add to the comfort of earthly enjoyments, as it will lead us to view them as the gifts of our heavenly Father. We often eſteem gifts, not according to their real intrinſic value, but in proportion to our love of the giver, and as an evidence or expreſſion of his affection for us. So the pious ſoul receives the good things of this life, as evidences of God's peculiar love, and therefore enjoys the giver in the gift, which greatly increaſes all his outward proſperity. But not to enlarge here, I proceed to ſay,

6. Another benefit ariſing from drawing near to God is, that it produces calmneſs and ſerenity of mind at all times, and eſpecially in the near view and approach of death.

So long as the ſoul keeps near to God, it muſt enjoy reſt and peace. This, indeed, is implied in what has already been ſaid, and therefore need not be repeated. But it may be worth while to conſider the benefit of this, in the immediate view and near approach of death. This is a trying hour, which ſhall come upon and try all fleſh; it is an hour, when the world and all its enjoyments can

afford

afford no ſupport or comfort ; when even the fleſh and the heart will fail us. But the ſoul that has lived near to God, and that can now draw near to him, will remain calm and unmoved. Death will be ſtripped of its terrors, and the ſoul triumphantly ſay, "Though I walk through the valley of the ſhadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou, Lord, art with me. O death! where is thy ſting? O grave! where is thy victory?" Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace. I may add,

7. Drawing near to God in his worſhip and ſervice here, and in thoſe holy exerciſes of heart, in which communion with him conſiſts, will fit the ſoul for heaven.

The happineſs of heaven, we know, conſiſts in being near to God, and in thoſe holy exerciſes of heart, which are put forth, in worſhipping him in ſpirit and truth. Now, it is evident, that the ſoul which truly draws near to God in this life, is in ſome meaſure wrought to a fitneſs for heaven. Hence ſays the apoſtle, "He who hath wrought us for the ſelf ſame thing is God, who hath alſo given us the earneſt of the ſpirit;" that is, the firſt fruits of the heavenly Canaan. It is true, indeed, that the nearneſs to God, which any enjoy in this life, is at beſt very imperfect and often interrupted. But he who has begun a good work in any ſoul, will carry it on until, and complete it at, the day of Chriſt. And the nearer we live to God in this

world, the greater will be our preparation to dwell with him forever, in the world to come.

What now remains is to improve the ſubject.

1. Is it a thing ſo good in itſelf, ſo pleaſing and advantageous to the ſoul, to draw near to God? then what reaſon, what encouragement have we to draw near to God, and live in communion with him!

Surely the pſalmiſt might well ſay, "It is good for me to draw near to God;" and with equal propriety may we ſay the ſame. But, alas! how few are there, who are at all acquainted with this happineſs? The generality of the world chooſe to be at a diſtance from God, and deſire not the knowledge of him or of his ways. They have never taſted that the Lord is gracious. But even thoſe, who have known ſomething of what it is, to draw near to God, are not careful, as they ought to be, to live near him. Alas! my chriſtian friends, how ſhamefully, how criminally negligent and indifferent are we in this reſpect. Are we not too indifferent about the means of drawing near to God? Do we not many times feel cold and indifferent about the public worſhip and ordinances of God, which he has inſtituted and appointed, as mediums, by and through which, we may draw near to him? And when we attend upon theſe means of grace, are we not too indifferent, whether we get near to God and enjoy him, or not? Do our ſouls hunger and thirſt after God, and after the times and ſeaſons of drawing near to him, in public and private worſhip,

as

as our bodies do for their daily meals? Or as we do to converſe with our beſt friends? Surely if we prized the happy privilege as we ought, we ſhould often be impatient for the time of drawing near to God. God condeſcends, not only to allow us, but even to invite us, to draw near to him. And Chriſt ſpeaks of manifeſting himſelf to his friends, as he does not to the world; and ſays, "If any man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him!" Happy ſoul! in whom God and Chriſt dwell! And ſhould we not deſire, ſhould we not ſeek after God, when the pleaſure and delight, when the benefits and advantages, are ſo many and ſo great? And when God and Chriſt encourage and invite us to it? Could we always keep near to God, what a ſource of delight ſhould we enjoy! It would not be in the power of earth or hell to diſturb our peace and reſt. If through the infirmity of the fleſh, we ſometimes depart from God, let us think on our ways, and make haſte, and delay not to return to him. Let us remember, that we are daily drawing nearer to that heavenly reſt, where our ſouls hope and expect ever to live near to God, to dwell forever with him, to behold his face in righteouſneſs, and to be ſatisfied with his likeneſs. Let us be concerned, then, to live nearer to him now, that we may be the better prepared for heaven, and have clearer and ſtronger evidence of our right and title to it.

2. If there be ſo much pleaſure and delight in drawing near to God in his worſhip and ordinances now, and ſuch benefit and advantages from it here, how great muſt the happineſs of heaven be!

There are ſome favored and happy moments, when the real chriſtian enjoys heavenly delight; when he gets ſo near to God, and has ſuch pleaſing views of his character, ſuch near and intimate communion with him, and ſuch lively manifeſtations and communications of his grace, that he even longs to be abſent from the body, that he may be preſent with the Lord. But theſe are ſhort and momentary ſeaſons; they are ſoon interrupted. But the happineſs of heaven is far ſuperior, and it is conſtant and durable. In this life, our enjoyment of God is imperfect at beſt, and of very ſhort and uncertain continuance; but there it is perfect and everlaſting. Here we ſee as through a glaſs darkly; but there face to face! Here we ſee but in part, and know but in part; but there we ſhall ſee as we are ſeen, and know as we are known! As it is happy to be near God in this life; ſo it will be unſpeakably happier to be near him in heaven. It is more than probable, that this is what conſtitutes the perfection of the ſoul there; that this is the reaſon, why there is no ſin and no temptation there; that this is the reaſon, why the ſoul is perfect in every grace, in every virtue, and excellence. It is filled with God. God has, indeed, taken up his everlaſting abode in it, and he conſtantly imparts of his infinite fulneſs

to

to it. O! how happy muſt heaven be! and how truly bleſſed are thoſe who poſſeſs it!

3. If the greateſt happineſs that can be enjoyed on earth, and all the happineſs of heaven, conſiſts in being near to God; then how far from happineſs muſt thoſe be, who are far from God!

The pſalmiſt ſaid, in the verſe immediately preceding the text, "Lo! they that are far from God ſhall periſh;" and then adds, "but it is good for me to draw near to God." Man was happy in his original ſtate, when he was near to God; but as ſoon as he forſook God, he was plunged into a ſtate of miſery. Forſaking God is the cauſe of all the miſery that is found in the world; and this world would have been but little better than a hell of miſery, if Chriſt had not come to recover us to God. The only reaſon, why wicked men, who are far from God, are no more miſerable now, is, becauſe the things of the world take up their attention, and pleaſe their bodily ſenſes. But how completely miſerable will they be, when ſtripped of all their worldly enjoyments, and baniſhed forever from God! Let thoſe, then, who are now ſtrangers to God, and who chooſe to remain far from him, who, in their hearts and conduct, ſay unto God, "Depart from us"—let ſuch remember how dreadful it will be, to be baniſhed forever from God, by thoſe awful words, "Depart from me, ye curſed, into everlaſting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

SERMON IX.

The reſtleſs Soul reſting in God.

PSALM cxvi. 7.

Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul.

THERE is, in every man, a certain ſomething, which we uſually call the ſoul. This we know, we feel, to be different from theſe groſs, theſe fleſhly bodies, which we carry about with us. It is ſomething, which animates the body, which has a commanding influence over all the bodily organs, and which conſtantly prompts us to ſeek after objects, ſuperior to all earthly enjoyments, to ſatisfy its boundleſs deſires. This ſoul of ours is evidently and eſſentially different from that ſpirit, which actuates brutes. Their deſires are few, they are eaſily ſatisfied, and they are ſatisfied with preſent enjoyments. But the ſoul of man is ever reſtleſs and uneaſy, never ſatisfied with preſent enjoyments, but ever on the wing, ever in purſuit of ſomething new. Even the moſt pleaſing and promiſing proſpects deceive us, and fail

of

of that satisfaction in the enjoyment, which we expected. When disappointed of the satisfaction, in the enjoyment of any object, which pleased us in expectation; instead of being convinced, that it is not in the power of any earthly enjoyment to satisfy the desires of the soul, we fly as eagerly as ever to some other object, promising ourselves, that we shall find that satisfaction *in this*, which every former enjoyment failed of affording us. And thus the mind wanders, from object to object, from one enjoyment to another, in pursuit of what it can never obtain, from all the enjoyments of this world.

"We try new pleasures, but we feel
"The inward thirst and torment still."

There may, indeed, be some short lived and momentary satisfaction, from the enjoyment of some favorite object; but it is, at best, but short lived and momentary; like the morning cloud and early dew, it soon passes away. For the truth of these observations, I dare appeal to the experience of every one present, as well as to the history of mankind, in every age and in every part of the world. Sometimes, indeed, we may find those, who, for the present moment, may be disposed to question, if not deny, this truth. They seem to imagine, that they have found the happiness, the rest, the satisfaction, that they have been in pursuit of: But tarry with them a few days, and you will find, that their sunshine of happiness begins to be ob-

scured

ſcured by intervening clouds, and they ſtill look forward to a brighter day, which they expect from new, not from preſent, acquiſitions. Thus are mankind in general, be their preſent enjoyments what they may, like the rich man in the parable, whoſe ground brought forth plentifully, ſo that he had not where to beſtow his goods. He thought within himſelf what to do; and at length reſolves, I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I beſtow my goods. And what then? Why, then I will ſay to my ſoul, Soul, thou haſt much goods laid up for many years; take thine eaſe, &c. Obſerve, notwithſtanding all his preſent wealth, notwithſtanding all his preſent poſſeſſions, he could not be happy now; but when this and the other object is obtained, *then* he ſhall be happy. So it is with all mankind. But, what ſhall we ſay to theſe things? Was man made to be the ſport of fancy? Was he made only to be deceived with the proſpect of happineſs, which can never be realized? To be conſtantly led about by an *ignis fatuus*, which can never be overtaken, and which will finally plunge him in the ditch? No, certainly. This would be a reflection on his Maker. This would be a ſtate leſs deſirable than that of a brute, whoſe deſires indeed are fewer, and of a much lower nature, and much more eaſily and perfectly ſatisfied. Some, perhaps, may imagine, that it is no matter whether a man's happineſs conſiſts in preſent enjoyments, or in the pleaſing expectation

pectation of future good, which he ſhall never find ; but can this be juſt ? Though it is true, that a man may enjoy great preſent pleaſure, from the anticipation of future good ; yet will not the pain and the mortification, which ariſes from blaſted hopes and diſappointed expectations, nearly equal, if not overbalance, his deluſive happineſs ? Muſt it not fill him with regret, to think he has been all the time purſuing a ſhadow, and catching at a phantom ? Surely, truth is more eligible than falſehood. It would be more eligible to deſire leſs, and enjoy all that we deſire ; than to deſire more, and enjoy nothing. It cannot be, therefore, that God has made the ſoul of man capable of ſuch vaſt deſires, and yet put it abſolutely out of his power, ever to obtain that which will ſatisfy it. There is a reſt that remaineth to the people of God ; there is that which will fully ſatisfy the deſires of an immortal ſoul ; there is a hope, which maketh not aſhamed, and which ſhall be as an anchor to the ſoul, ſure and ſteadfaſt. God himſelf has ſaid, " Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it ;" that is, Extend your deſires as far as you pleaſe, and I will ſatisfy them. But, in order to this, our deſires muſt be fixed on the right object ; we muſt chooſe the better part ; we muſt ſet our affections on things above ; we muſt look not at things ſeen and temporal ; but at thoſe which are not ſeen, and which are eternal. We ought not to conclude, that, becauſe worldly objects and enjoyments

joyments never satisfy, never afford that happiness, which we promised ourselves from them, but have always disappointed our expectations; I say, we ought not from hence to conclude, that nothing can satisfy the desires of the soul. When we find ourselves disappointed in our expectations from the world, and when we have roved, from object to object, and from one enjoyment to another, in the pursuit of rest, let us then say with the psalmist, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." Here, then, we may,

I. More particularly consider, that there is an object, on which the soul may rest, or in the enjoyment of which it may find satisfaction and happiness, equal to its highest expectation.

II. Shew what this object is.

III. Shew what is implied in the soul's returning to this rest, or how it may do this.

I. Let us now particularly consider, that there is an object, on which the soul may rest, or in the enjoyment of which it may find satisfaction and happiness, equal to its highest expectation.

And if it be true, that there is such an object, on which the soul may rest, and in the enjoyment of which it can find full satisfaction, must it not be a pleasing, a delightful thought, to the weary and heavy laden soul, that has been long on the wing, flying from object to object, in the pursuit of rest, and yet finding none? Surely it must. But, alas! how few are there, who are yet convinced,

vinced, that they can find no reſt on worldly enjoyments? Though they have been a thouſand times diſappointed in their expectations from the world, they will yet think, that they ſhall finally find what they have ſo long been in the purſuit of. But, if there are any, who are wearied with the purſuit of worldly happineſs, and convinced that real ſatisfaction cannot be had in any of the enjoyments of this life, *they* will rejoice to hear, that there is an object, on which the ſoul may reſt, and in the enjoyment of which they may find real happineſs. He, who has formed the ſoul of man within him, and filled it with vaſt and boundleſs deſires of happineſs, has alſo formed a happineſs adequate to its deſires. He has ſet this happineſs before us. He has appointed and revealed the way, in which we may ſeek and find it. He has ſaid, "Aſk, and it ſhall be given you; ſeek, and ye ſhall find; knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you. Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt. Learn of me, and ye ſhall find reſt unto your ſouls." But, the great difficulty is, vain man would be wiſe, though born like the wild aſs's colt. Being wiſe in his own conceit, he refuſes to hearken to the voice of God; he chooſes to walk in his own ways, and to follow his own devices; to walk in the ſight of his own eyes, and after the deſire of his own heart. He vainly imagines, that his own wiſdom is ſufficient to direct him, and that he can obtain the object of his wiſhes, by following

his

his own inclinations. The great reaſon, therefore, why mankind are not happy, are not ſatisfied, and their ſouls at reſt, is not becauſe there is no reſt for the ſoul; it is not becauſe God has formed deſires which cannot be ſatisfied, and hedged up the way to happineſs, on purpoſe that we might never find it; but, it is owing to our own perverſeneſs and obſtinacy; to our rejecting the counſel of God againſt ourſelves, and placing our happineſs in things, which can never profit, which can never afford, and which were never *deſigned* to afford, happineſs. Ever ſince the fatal apoſtaſy of mankind from God, the hearts of the ſons of men have been fully ſet in them to do evil. Our firſt parents learned diſcontentment with the happy ſtation, which Divine Providence aſſigned them; they aſpired after independence and a rivalſhip with God; they wandered from the path of duty, in which God had placed them; and not only loſt the greater happineſs and reſt, which they were in purſuit of, but they loſt all that they before poſſeſſed. And all their poſterity poſſeſs the ſame ſpirit and temper, and purſue the wandering ſteps of their firſt parents; hereby plainly proving, that they are the children of thoſe, who, at firſt, revolted from God, and deſerve the ſame curſe. Like the prodigal ſon, we are uneaſy in our Father's houſe; we diſlike his authority and government; we cannot bear the reſtraint of his laws; we ſigh and long to be releaſed. Like the prodigal, too, we forſake

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the fulneſs of good, the reſt, the peace, the joy of our Father's houſe, and wander in purſuit of forbidden pleaſures; we try all the pleaſures of ſin; we even endeavor to fill our bellies with the huſks, which ſwine do eat. Wretched condition! piteous ſtate! But, when, like the prodigal, we come to ourſelves, when we awake from our vain and deluſive dreams, to ſee our true ſtate, and feel our wretchedneſs and miſery, and can ſay with him, "In my father's houſe is bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with hunger;" that is, when we are led to reflect, that in God there is enough, and more than enough, to ſatisfy all our wants; and, therefore, with him, reſolve, "I will return to my father, and will ſay, Father, I have ſinned againſt heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy ſon;" then we ſhall find, as he did, a Father coming forth to meet us, ready, with open arms, to receive us to the boſom of his love, and making ample proviſion for our future joy, reſt, honor, and perfect felicity. This leads us, in the next place, more particularly,

II. To conſider what that object is, on which the weary ſoul, tired with the purſuit of happineſs, in the deluſive pleaſures of this life, may reſt, and in the enjoyment of which it may be happy.

And what object, what enjoyment is there, that can ſatisfy the boundleſs deſires of an immortal ſoul, but that which is as boundleſs as thoſe deſires? And where is this object to be found? The depth,

that

that is, the depth of the earth, ſaith, It is not in me The ſea ſaith, It is not in me! Every created object ſaith, It is not in me! Theſe are all finite, limited objects. God alone is able to fill the ſoul of man; he only can give it reſt, and ſatisfy all its deſires. It is his infinite fulneſs, that fills all in all. He has formed the ſoul of man to find reſt and happineſs in the enjoyment of himſelf; and it is vain to expect it in the enjoyment of any other object. Every object muſt fail of affording reſt and peace to the ſoul, in the ſame proportion as it is foreign from God. And the ſoul that has once truly found reſt in God, will very feelingly adopt the language of the pſalmiſt, and ſay, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth, that I deſire beſides thee. Thou art my portion, O Lord. O God, thou art my God, early will I ſeek thee: My ſoul thirſteth for thee, my fleſh longeth in a dry and thirſty land, where no water is. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, ſo my ſoul panteth after thee, O God. My ſoul thirſteth for God, for the living God: When ſhall I come and appear before God?" Wearied with the deluſions of a vain world, the ſoul returns to God, and finds reſt in him. This undoubtedly is what the pſalmiſt intends by his reſt, when he ſays, in our text, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul;" for he adds, "The Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." He had experienced the power, the goodneſs, and the allſufficiency of God; and, therefore, would

renewedly

renewedly repair to him, and reſt his ſoul on him. But you may aſk, Does not the expreſſion of the pſalmiſt in the text, "Return unto thy reſt," imply, that he had wandered from this reſt, or that he did not, at all times, enjoy reſt and peace, joy and happineſs, in God? I anſwer, It undoubtedly does. The good man, who has choſen God for his portion, and who has often found great reſt and comfort in God, is at beſt but a very imperfect creature; he is ſanctified but in part; his fleſh luſteth againſt his ſpirit; he often wanders from God, his ſupreme object; the world, with its deluſive charms, for the preſent moment, captivate his too thoughtleſs heart, and he ſets his affections on earthly enjoyments, and forgets that he cannot find reſt in himſelf. But, ſoon he perceives, that he has wandered from his reſt, and is impatient until he returns. He will, therefore, often find occaſion to ſay, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul." This is owing, not to any inſufficiency in God, the object on which his ſoul reſts, to afford him perfect, perpetual, and undiſturbed reſt and felicity; but to his own imperfection, to his wandering, roving heart. In God, there is enough to ſatisfy every deſire of every reſtleſs ſoul; and of his fulneſs we may all receive, even grace for grace. He is a fountain open, not ſhut up and ſealed; he is a never failing good, to all that truſt in him; he is a ſure foundation. Hence we read, "They that wait upon the Lord ſhall be as mount Zion, which can never be

moved." And again, "Thou wilt keep him in *perfect* peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." In proportion as the affections of the heart are placed on God, in the same proportion does the soul find rest and peace in him. But it is far otherwise with respect to earthly things; for, in proportion as our affections are placed on them, the greater our anxiety and uneasiness will be. He, who rests his soul on God, will find all peace, joy and comfort. It was this that made the psalmist resolve ever to wait on God; at all times to trust in him. It was this that calmed all his fears, that stilled the tumult of his ruffled mind, that filled him with such undaunted confidence and courage, and that made him express himself in such language as this: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host encamp against me, yet will I not fear. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the sea. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." Thus may the soul, that truly rests on God, make her boast in the Lord; for God himself speaks peace to such a soul. "Fear thou not, saith God, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God. My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness.

All

All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Is it not, then, abundantly evident, that the weary soul may at all times rest on God? And that he is the only object, which can afford perfect rest and peace to the soul?

SERMON X.

The reſtleſs Soul reſting on God.

PSALM cxvi. 7.

Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul.

SHOULD I be ſo happy, in this diſcourſe, as to find any reſtleſs, weary, heavy laden ſoul, which longs to find reſt, to find ſomething on which it can ſafely and calmly repoſe itſelf; I may be ſure of the attention of ſuch an one, to what I have yet to offer on this ſubject. And may I not alſo expect the attention of ſuch as have already returned to God, and found reſt in him? Such, I am ſure, will feel a ſatisfaction in being confirmed in that reſt and peace, which they enjoy; yea, they will often find it neceſſary to call home their wandering affections, and to ſay with the pſalmiſt, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul."

We have already conſidered, that there is an object (and O! remember that there is but one) on which the ſoul may reſt, and in the enjoyment

of

of which, it may find satisfaction and happineſs, equal to its moſt enlarged deſires and higheſt expectations. We have alſo conſidered, that this object is God; that he who formed the ſoul, who made it to be happy in the enjoyment of himſelf, that he alone, can ſatisfy its deſires and give it reſt. Are you convinced of the truth of theſe obſervations? And are you deſirous of inquiring how you ſhall go to God, in ſuch a way and manner, as to find reſt and peace, joy and comfort in him? It ſhall be my endeavor to anſwer your inquiry, while I proceed to the *third* thing propoſed from the ſubject, which was,

III. To ſhow what is implied in the ſoul's returning to this reſt, or how it may do this.

The inquiry is important; and the more ſo, becauſe many quiet themſelves with a falſe reſt, and peace, which will fail them, at a time when they moſt of all will need it. Many imagine, that they have reſt in God, while they are indeed reſting on other objects. Let us beware, that we do not deceive ourſelves with a vain hope. If I am not deceived, the ſubject, which we have already been conſidering, or what was ſaid in the laſt diſcourſe, will help us to anſwer this important inquiry. The ſoul of man, we have obſerved, is full of reſtleſs deſires; it flies from object to object, in purſuit of ſatisfaction, comfort, or happineſs. This, I think, every one will readily acknowledge from his own experience. And he muſt, at the ſame

time, as readily acknowledge, that that object, or enjoyment, to which the soul flies for comfort, has the affections of the heart, or has its love. It is only by the affections, that the soul flies to any object. In the exercise of hope, desire, love, confidence, &c. the soul rests on an object; and in proportion as these exercises centre in, or are fixed upon, any object, in the same proportion does the soul fly to, or rest upon, that object. This being allowed (which certainly cannot be denied) it is evident,

1. That the soul's returning to God, as its rest, must imply, that the affections of the soul, its desire, hope, love, joy, and confidence, are placed on him.

Love is, indeed, the leading and governing affection of the soul; it necessarily carries all the affections of the heart along with it, to the object on which it rests. The object, which we love, is certainly the object of our desire; we never desire what we do not love. Hope, also, attends on love; for what we love, that we hope for; nor do we ever rejoice, or put confidence in any object, which we do not love. Indeed, all these exercises of hope, desire, joy, and confidence, are but modifications of love, or love variously expressed. So that love and affection are commonly used to signify the same thing. Love, also, commands those exercises of the heart, which are opposed to it, such as fear, dread, abhorrence, &c. For the only reason why we fear, is because we

love;

love; not becauſe we love and fear the ſame object; but becauſe, when we love any object, then we are afraid of every thing, that will rob us of, or prevent our obtaining or enjoying that object. We never fear loſing any thing, which we do not love; nor dread any thing, but what is oppoſed to the object, on which our love is placed. In proportion to our love of any object, in the ſame proportion will be our fear, our dread, our abhorrence of every thing, that oppoſes that object. Love, therefore, is the leading, governing affection of the ſoul; it is in the exerciſe of this affection, properly ſpeaking, that the ſoul reſts on any object. Hence it is evident, that in order to the ſoul's reſting on God, its ſupreme love muſt be placed on him. In the ſame proportion as we love God, we ſhall reſt on him, we ſhall place our hopes, deſires, joys, and confidence in him. Hence pious men made thoſe warm, pathetic expreſſions of love to God, which we mentioned, in the laſt diſcourſe: "Whom have I in heaven, but God?" &c. &c. The ſoul can never return to God, as its reſt, can never find real joy and comfort, peace and happineſs in God, whilſt it loves other objects and enjoyments more than God. Hence it is, that God has ſaid, "There is no peace to the wicked; the wicked are like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt." Before the ſoul can ever return to God, and reſt on him, it muſt, like the returning prodi-

gal, be brought to a ſenſe of its wretchedneſs and miſery; it muſt ſee itſelf reduced to the greateſt extremity; muſt ſee that it has been ſeeking for reſt and happineſs, where it can never be found; it muſt feel its affections returning home to its long forſaken Father, and rejoicing in his perfection and government. Then, and then only, can the ſoul reſt on God. In this way, whoſoever cometh to him ſhall find reſt.

2. Returning to God, as our reſt, muſt imply a free, full, entire, and cheerful ſubmiſſion to his will.

The ſoul can never reſt itſelf on God, until it cheerfully acquieſces in his will. Reſt muſt neceſſarily imply a calm, quiet, peaceable ſtate; but this is certainly inconſiſtent with an uneaſy, diſcontented, troubled mind. There can be no reſt in God, or in any thing elſe, while the heart feels a diſpoſition to murmur or complain, or to be in any meaſure unwilling to ſubmit to the will of God. The moment ſuch a diſpoſition ariſes in the heart, the reſt of the ſoul is diſturbed. This is the great cauſe of all, that ſinful departure of mankind from God, An unwillingneſs to ſubmit to his authority and government. When, therefore, the ſoul returns to God, as its reſt, it comes and makes a cheerful and entire ſubmiſſion of itſelf, and its all, to the will of God. It rejoices in the univerſal dominion and government of the Diety; it is pleaſed with the thought of being reſigned to his will. There can be no true love to God, without a love of ſubmiſſion

to his will, his authority, and ſuperintendency. In proportion as we are uneaſy and diſcontented with the will of God, our love to him abates. It is undoubtedly true, that the beſt of men, even thoſe who enjoy the greateſt reſt in God, do ſometimes feel a degree of reluctance at complying with the will of God; murmuring thoughts may ariſe; the paſſions not ſubdued may rebel. But when this is the caſe, their reſt and peace are diſturbed, nor can they become calm and quiet, and enjoy reſt, until they return to God, in a way of unfeigned ſubmiſſion to his all perfect will, and give up all to his diſpoſal. I may add,

3. Returning to God, as our reſt, further implies faith in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, which is the only way of reconciliation between God and man.

It is only through Chriſt, and by faith in him, that the ſoul can reſt in God. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father, but by him. He is our peace, who hath made peace for us. Through the all atoning merits of his blood, God is willing to receive returning prodigals. And in the belief of this, the ſoul returns to God, and reſts on him. This faith, alſo, includes a belief of the divine promiſes to the penitent ſinner; a reliance and confidence in God, that he will fulfil his word, on which he has cauſed him to hope. In this way, the word and promiſes of God lead the ſoul to reſt. But when the chriſtian ſuffers his faith to fail, when he becomes ſlow

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of heart to believe ; his reſt is interrupted and diſturbed, nor can he recover it, until his faith is confirmed and eſtabliſhed, and he exerciſes a lively and unſhaken confidence in God.

Becauſe of the imperfection of the beſt of men, in this life, on account of the remainders of ſin within them, and the luſting of the fleſh againſt the ſpirit, there is no ſuch thing as ſettled reſt, in the preſent ſtate ; the beſt of men will frequently have occaſion to call home their wandering affections, and ſay, " Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul." But the more our hearts are filled with love to God, and the more we are reſigned to the will of God, the greater our reſt and peace will be, and nothing but a departure from God can diſturb this reſt. There is, therefore, every inducement to return unto God, as our reſt, that there could be, if perfect, undiſturbed reſt was the conſequence ; for it will really be ſo, in proportion to our love and ſubjection to God. And in this way only can the ſoul be trained up to a fitneſs for that ſtate of perfect, uninterrupted, never ceaſing reſt and felicity, which is reſerved for the ſaints in Zion above, and which certainly conſiſts in the moſt ardent love to God, and the moſt perfect and entire ſubjection to his will. The nearer we reſemble the bleſſed ſpirits above, in the temper and diſpoſition of our hearts, the more we ſhall partake of their reſt and felicity ; the greater will be our evidence of our right and title to their joys ; the more ſhall we rejoice

joice in the hope of the glory of God; and the more ſenſibly ſhall we feel and ſay with the pſalmiſt, "I ſhall be ſatisfied, when I awake in thy likeneſs."

IMPROVEMENT.

1. The ſubject naturally leads us to reflect, how wiſely God has ordered it, that men ſhould find ſo little happineſs, and meet with ſo many diſappointments, troubles and afflictions, in this world.

We are ready, many times, to wonder, why there is ſo little happineſs, and ſo many troubles, in this life. We are too often ready to complain of the little comfort, and of the many trials, troubles, and afflictions, which we here meet with; and when our moſt pleaſing hopes are diſappointed, and our moſt flattering expectations are blaſted, we are too apt to think that ours is a hard lot. But, what are theſe hopes and expectations, which we complain of as diſappointed? What are theſe troubles and afflictions, which are ſo hard and tedious to be borne? Are they not all worldly? And why have theſe things been ſuch troubles and diſappointments to us? Was it not becauſe we ſet our affections too much upon them, and promiſed ourſelves more from them than, in the nature of things, they could afford? The truth is, notwithſtanding all the diſappointments, troubles, and afflictions, which we meet with, in this life; notwithſtanding our experience

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of the insufficiency of all worldly enjoyments, to afford us rest and happiness, yet we do fly to them for rest, and endeavor to repose ourselves on them. It is wise, therefore, it is kind in God, to order that these things should disappoint us, that thereby we might be led to seek for that rest and that happiness, which he designed and fitted us for; and that we might seek it now, while there is an opportunity to obtain it. Indeed, it is impossible, in the nature of things, that earthly objects should satisfy the desires of a rational and immortal soul, which is formed to enjoy rest in God. To complain, therefore, because the world does not make us happy, or because we cannot derive happiness from it, is to complain, that we were made men, that we were not made brutes. Could the world deceive us, could it disappoint our hopes and expectations, if we did not set our affections too much upon it? Should we complain of it, if our souls sought for rest only in God? No, certainly. Is it not then wisely ordered of God, that we should find so little happiness, and meet with so many disappointments, troubles, and even vexations, from the world, that so we might be led to rest in God only? If men could find rest and peace, joy and felicity, in this world, they never would seek the heavenly rest. What then must become of the soul, when stripped of all its worldly enjoyments; when it quitted the present state, and entered the world of spirits? Let us, then,

instead

inſtead of complaining, that the world is full of trouble, diſappointment, and ſorrow, be thankful to God, that he is, in this way, weaning us from the world; and let us be concerned ſo to improve theſe things, as that we may thereby be led to God, and reſt ourſelves on him.

2. Let us learn the true and only proper uſe of worldly enjoyments, namely, to lead us to God, the ſupreme Source of reſt and bleſſedneſs.

As comforts and conveniences here, we ſhould receive them as evidences of the goodneſs of God. They may ſerve, in this way, to lead our hearts to the Fountain of all good. They may help us the better to ſerve God, and prepare us for the heavenly reſt. But they ſhould never have our hearts; we ſhould never place our happineſs in them, or attempt to reſt our ſouls upon them. It is our own flattering expectations, which deceive and diſappoint us. The fault is not in the world, or the things of it; they anſwer all the ends for which they were deſigned. The fault is in ourſelves; we deceive ourſelves; we prepare diſappointments and ſorrows, troubles and afflictions, for ourſelves, by overvaluing the world, and promiſing ourſelves that from it, which it was never deſigned to give us, and which it never can afford.

3. Let none blame God, if they are not happy, if they do not enjoy reſt and peace.

This men are diſpoſed to do; but it is infinitely unreaſonable. "The fooliſhneſs of man perverteth

eth his way, and his heart fretteth againſt the Lord." God has formed the ſoul of man, not only with deſires of happineſs, but with a capacity of obtaining and enjoying happineſs; and this a happineſs not mean, low, and contemptible, like that of brutes; but a happineſs divine and Godlike, truly worthy of a rational and immortal mind. He has alſo kindly and plainly told us what this happineſs is, and wherein it conſiſts. And he has opened a way for our attainment and enjoyment of it. When we had forfeited and loſt it, and might juſtly have been left to periſh in our miſery, he ſent his own Son to recover it for us, and his Holy Spirit to lead and guide us to it; and he uſes every argument and motive with us, to perſuade us to ſeek after it. If, therefore, we finally miſs of it, it muſt be owing to our own wilful, perverſe and obſtinate refuſal of it. It muſt be becauſe we ſeek it in wrong objects, and in ſuch a way as it can never be obtained. It concerns all, therefore, *now* to make a wiſe and happy choice. Wherefore,

4. Let every ſoul be perſuaded to reſt in God.

Let us return to him as our only reſt. We have, like prodigals, forſaken our heavenly Father, in whom alone we can enjoy reſt. We have tried the world, its enjoyments and pleaſures, enough to convince us, if we will act like rational beings, that there is no reſt to be found in theſe things. Let each of us, then, ſeriouſly and ſolemnly call upon our ſouls, and ſay, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul."

ſoul." Let us return to God, as our only reſt; and let us carefully remember what is implied in doing this. There are many, who ſeem to be convinced of the neceſſity of returning to God for reſt; and yet they ſtop ſhort of him. They reſt upon religious duties; they betake themſelves to prayer, and other devotional exerciſes, and here they reſt, here they ſtop. But, methinks ſome may be ready to ſay, Is not this the way to return to God, in the performance of religious duties? I ſay, that barely to perform the external duties of religion is not returning to God; yet the pious ſoul does often return to God in the performance of theſe duties. But then it does not reſt upon the duty, but upon God, to whom it draws near in duty. Hypocrites reſt upon the religious duties, which they perform, not on God; but the truly gracious ſoul reſts on God, in the exerciſe of holy love, and unfeigned ſubmiſſion, and lively faith; and theſe exerciſes are not only expreſſed, but many times awakened, excited, and ſtirred up, by the performance of religious duties. In order, therefore, to our returning to God, it is not enough that we ſet ourſelves to perform the external duties of religion; but the ſoul muſt go to God in them, or they are all nothing.

Not only is it important for thoſe, who have never yet returned to God, as their reſt, now to do it; leſt God, provoked by their revolt, ſhould ſwear in his wrath, that they ſhall not enter into his

reſt:

reſt: But the real chriſtian, who has heretofore fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope ſet before him, will find occaſion renewedly to do it. The pſalmiſt, no doubt, was a good man, before he expreſſed himſelf in the words of the text. How often will the good man find himſelf diſturbed by fears ſome evil to come upon himſelf, his family, his friends, or the church of God; and perhaps his ſoul will be greatly overwhelmed and caſt down within him! How important then will it be for him to calm his fears, by ſaying, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul!" How often is the good man in trouble, on account of ſome worldly loſſes, afflictions, or bereavements, and is ready to give up himſelf to grief, and ſay with Jacob, "All theſe things are againſt me!" What a happy effect will it have for him truly to ſay, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul!" How often does he find his heart going out in unreaſonable deſires after the world! And then what reſt will he find in ſaying, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul!" How often does he find himſelf cold, remiſs, and negligent in religion! And then his moſt certain remedy is, to ſay, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul." And in that laſt, that greateſt, and moſt important trial in this world, when death ſhall lay its cold hand upon him, when his fleſh and his heart ſhall fail him, then let him ſay, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul;" and his ſoul ſhall be immediately admitted to that reſt, which remaineth for the people of God.

SERMON

SERMON XI.

The Friend of God.

JAMES ii. 23.

And he was called the friend of God.

TO be esteemed by great and good men, to have their love and friendship, is an honor and happiness, worthy of the desire and pursuit of every one. But to obtain the friendship of God, how much more honorable is it! How much more to be desired and sought after! This is what some men have obtained, and what all might obtain, if they would only seek it aright. Abraham obtained this honorable character, that he was called *the friend of God.* He was not only called so by men, who knew the intimacy that there was between God and him; but he was called so by God himself. Hear the divine declaration concerning him. "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham *my friend.*" Friendship is love; it is almost more than love; it is more than that cold and lifeless affection, which

moſt men feel for one another; it is a warm and benevolent affection, which ſubſiſts between hearts mutually united, where there is an intimacy of union, where there is a mutual interchange of love and endearing benevolent actions. Such friendſhip can ſubſiſt only between kindred ſouls; can be found no where, but in hearts formed for love. There is ſomething, which, in many reſpects, reſembles this friendſhip, in a ſelfiſh and wicked perſon, but it is influenced and reſtricted by mercenary motives; and whenever it appears to be for the perſonal ſafety or advantage of ſuch a man, he will deſert and forſake, and ſometimes betray his friend. True friendſhip, therefore, is founded in really diſintereſted love; it cannot exiſt without virtuous affection; it is found only in the gracious heart; it is an exerciſe of true Godlike love and benevolence. Abraham was the friend of God, and God was the friend of Abraham. The expreſſion, "and he was called the friend of God", may be deſigned to denote either the love and affection, which God had for Abraham, or that which Abraham had for God; in both theſe reſpects, Abraham was the friend of God. There was a mutual affection and endearing intimacy between God and Abraham, as there is between near and intimate friends on earth. Here, then, let us conſider,

I. How God manifeſted his friendſhip to Abraham: And then,

II. How Abraham manifeſted his friendſhip to God.

I. Let

I. Let us conſider how God manifeſted his friendſhip to Abraham.

It may be ſaid, in general, that all God's conduct towards Abraham was kind and benevolent; but there were ſome particular inſtances of his conduct, which were more peculiarly expreſſive of friendſhip, and which deſerve to be diſtinctly mentioned. Here then,

1. The firſt particular mark or token of God's friendſhip for Abraham, was his calling him from Ur of the Chaldees into the land of Canaan, and giving that land for an inheritance to himſelf, and to his ſeed after him. This is the firſt inſtance of God's particular favor to Abraham, which we find mentioned in ſacred hiſtory. Before this, he is only mentioned in the genealogy of his family, without any mark of diſtinction. But though nothing is ſaid of any peculiar intimacy between God and Abraham, before this call to leave his country; yet we muſt ſuppoſe, that Abraham was acquainted with God before; for, when he received this call, he knew it came from God, and he had ſo much love to him, ſo much faith in him, and ſuch an obedient heart, that he cheerfully went out, not knowing whither he went. This calling of Abraham, by God, was a very peculiar mark of the divine affection and favor towards him. Abraham was ſingled out, not only from among his brethren, his nation and people; but he only was thus called and choſen of God from all the inhabitants

of the world. And why was he thus called and choſen? Was it not becauſe he was the friend of God, the favorite of heaven? This clearly appears from what God ſaid to him at this time. Hear his endearing expreſſions of friendſhip. "Now the Lord ſaid unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's houſe, unto a land that I will ſhew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bleſs thee, and make thy name great: And thou ſhalt be a bleſſing. And I will bleſs them that bleſs thee, and curſe them that curſe thee: And in thee ſhall all the families of the earth be bleſſed." It is true, theſe bleſſings look further than to Abraham and his immediate family, even to the whole nation of the Jews that deſcended from him, and to all believers, even among the Gentile nations. And the deſign of God, in calling Abraham, and ſeparating him from the reſt of the world, was not merely for the ſake of manifeſting his love to Abraham, but for the ſupport of his church and people in the world. But that Abraham ſhould be the man, whom God ſhould chooſe; that he ſhould be the man, in whom all the families of the earth ſhould be bleſſed; this was an honor peculiar to Abraham, and ſhows him to be the friend of God. How dear to God muſt he be, to whom God ſays, "I will bleſs them that bleſs thee, and I will curſe them that curſe thee!" God would, in every thing, take the part of his friend, and intereſt himſelf

ſelf in his welfare and happineſs. Surely, then, God was the friend of Abraham.

2. Another mark of God's ſpecial regard and friendſhip for Abraham, was his entering into covenant with him, and thereby, as it were, making over to him all that he had.

It was an evidence of God's peculiar friendſhip for Abraham, that he took him and his poſterity into a particular covenant relation to him, and gave him an outward ſeal or token of this covenant. By this covenant, the ſeal of which he had in his fleſh, God engaged to be his God; he engaged to keep him, and to bleſs him; to give him temporal favors, and to beſtow upon him eternal life. Never had God before entered into ſuch a particular and formal covenant with any of the fallen ſons of Adam. Abraham was the firſt, with whom God thus viſibly covenanted, and to whom he gave a ſeal of his covenant. But you may inquire, what evidence was this of peculiar friendſhip for Abraham? Had not all his natural ſeed the ſame covenant, and the ſame ſeal of it? And has not God's viſible church and people ever ſince been his covenant people, and enjoyed the ſeal of his covenant? Grant it to be ſo; ſtill this does not prove, but that this was a peculiar token of God's friendſhip to Abraham. Was it not an honor to Abraham, and has it not been to his honor in every age of the world, that he was God's covenant friend, and that bleſſings were derived to all his ſeed

through him, agreeably to the promiſe, "In thee ſhall all the families of the earth be bleſſed?" Was it not, and is it not now, the honor of Abraham, that he was called the father of believers? Beſides, the covenant was ſure to Abraham in a different ſenſe, from what it was to all his natural ſeed; many of whom, notwithſtanding they had the ſeal of the covenant in their fleſh, never were really partakers of the ſpiritual bleſſings of the covenant. But Abraham was not only inſured by this covenant, that he ſhould have outward favors, a numerous ſeed, who ſhould certainly poſſeſs the land of Canaan; but God did, as it were, make over himſelf to Abraham; for he expreſsly ſays, "I will be a God to thee." Abraham had every ſpiritual bleſſing, which is contained in the covenant of grace, abſolutely confirmed to him; and this certainly muſt prove, that God was the friend of Abraham. Again,

3. Another thing, which evidences that God was a friend to Abraham, or another mark of his friendſhip, was, that he frequently viſited Abraham, or made viſible and ſenſible manifeſtations of himſelf to him.

Abraham was not, indeed, the only perſon, to whom God appeared, in the patriarchal age. Divine appearances were then frequent; many others were favored with them, as well as Abraham. But none but the friends of God, none but eminently pious and good men, were favored with

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ſuch divine viſits. We never read of God's appearing, or manifeſting himſelf, to wicked men. Abraham was not only favored by God with a viſible appearance, when God at firſt commanded him to leave his native country; but he was honored with frequent and repeated viſits, with kind and endearing manifeſtations, and with gracious and ſolemn promiſes. The firſt appearance of God to Abraham was, as we have obſerved, when he was called to leave his country, which we have an account of in the 12th chapter of Geneſis. What promiſes did God then make to him! How rich and full! The next particular and ſenſible viſit, which Abraham had from God, was when Lot and he parted, and Abraham, to prevent all difficulty and controverſy, had given liberty to Lot to chooſe any part of the land, and engaged himſelf to go another way. Then God appeared to him, and renewed the promiſe to give to him, and to his ſeed, all that land, and to make his poſterity numerous as the duſt of the earth. This is recorded in the 13th chapter. The 15th chapter is entirely taken up with an interview, ſhall I call it? or with a dialogue between God and Abraham, in which Abraham, who hitherto had no child, has the promiſe of a ſon, and of a ſeed as numerous as the ſtars of heaven; and in which he receives a renewed promiſe of Canaan, and a viſible token and pledge of his enjoying it. In the 17th chapter, God again appears to Abraham, enters into a

particular covenant with him, appoints the ſeal of the covenant to be circumciſion, and promiſes him another ſon, from Sarai, whoſe name is, by divine appointment, altered to Sarah. There are repeated accounts, after theſe, of God's appearing to Abraham, and converſing with him, renewing his promiſes, and encouraging his hope and confidence in him, and his obedience to him; but as theſe, which have been mentioned, are ſufficient to ſhew how, in this view, God was the friend of Abraham, I ſhall omit noticing them, and proceed to ſay,

4. It appears that God was the friend of Abraham, from his revealing his purpoſes and deſigns to Abraham, and thereby making him, as it were, the man of his council, his ſecret confidant, in whom he could confide.

In the 15th chapter, God informs Abraham, very particularly, what the ſtate of his poſterity ſhould be; that they ſhould be in bondage and ſervitude four hundred years, in a ſtrange land; that after that, they ſhould be brought out with great ſubſtance, and be put in poſſeſſion of the land of Canaan; and that theſe things ſhould take place after he was peaceably laid in his grave. "And thou ſhalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou ſhalt be buried in a good old age." But that which moſt of all diſcovers the friendſhip of God for Abraham, is his revealing to him what he deſigned reſpecting Sodom. The manner in which this account is given is indeed very remarkable. "And the

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Lord ſaid, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; ſeeing that Abraham ſhall ſurely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth ſhall be bleſſed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children, and his houſehold after him, and they ſhall keep the way of the Lord, to do juſtice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath ſpoken of him." Never could any thing more clearly diſcover God's friendſhip for any one, than this paſſage, which I have read, does God's friendly regard to Abraham. *And the Lord ſaid*, he ſaid to himſelf, he did as it were argue and reaſon the caſe with himſelf, *Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?* or, as ſome read it, *Am I hiding from Abraham that thing which I do?* Can I go about ſuch a thing, and not tell Abraham of it? Thus God is pleaſed to expreſs himſelf in the language of men, who often reveal to ſome very near and intimate friend thoſe purpoſes and reſolutions of their hearts, which they keep concealed from every one elſe. And the reaſon which he gives, why he would reveal this to Abraham, is not only greatly to Abraham's honor, but is further evidential of his friendſhip for him. "For I know him," ſays God; I am fully acquainted with him; he is my friend and favorite; he intereſts himſelf in my cauſe; and he is one for whom I have great things in view; he ſhall become a great nation. Abraham muſt know, for

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he will teach his houſehold, he will take care to improve this knowledge aright, to give counſel and warning to his children after him, that they may learn to do juſtice and judgment: Abraham muſt know, becauſe he will make a good uſe of his knowledge.

5. It appears that God was the friend of Abraham, or that he eſteemed and loved him, from his hearkening to the voice of his ſupplication, and regarding his interceſſion; or from the influence and efficacy of his fervent prayers.

The apoſtle tells us, that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much; and how is this verified in the inſtance of Abraham's interceſſion for Sodom! No ſooner had God revealed to Abraham his purpoſe reſpecting Sodom, than he undertakes to intercede for that city. As God had ſaid to himſelf, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? Shall I deſtroy Sodom, and not tell Abraham of it? So it ſeems as if Abraham ſaid to himſelf, Shall Sodom be deſtroyed, and I offer not one petition for its preſervation? After this, we have an account of his prayer, and the efficacy of it. Abraham drew near to God, in order to pour out his heart before him. And in his prayer he diſcovers great humility, great reverence of God, great faith in the juſtice and goodneſs of God, great pity and compaſſion towards ſinners; and yet great boldneſs and confidence in his addreſs to God. And we find, that, by his prayer,

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he obtained all that he really aſked for. God promiſed him, that he would ſpare the wicked for the ſake of the righteous; that, if he found fifty, or forty five, or thirty, or even ten, righteous perſons in the city, he would ſpare it. God continued granting his petitions, ſo long as Abraham continued to aſk; and though Abraham gave up his requeſt to have the city ſpared, if theſe could not be found; yet God granted his requeſt, that the righteous might not be deſtroyed with the wicked; and therefore he delivered juſt Lot from the deſtruction. Can any thing be more evidential of real friendſhip, of real love, affection, and eſteem, than this, to regard the petitions and grant the requeſts which are offered; eſpecially for God to regard and grant the requeſts, even all the requeſts of ſuch creatures as we are? Surely God was the friend of Abraham. I ſhall add only once more,

6. That God was the friend of Abraham, appears from the kindneſs, which God all along manifeſted towards him.

From the day that Abraham forſook his native land, to the laſt day of his life, God never left nor forſook him, but followed him with loving kindneſs and tender mercies. He continually protected and defended him; gave him peace from all the enemies which ſurrounded him; gave him favor with thoſe, among whom he at any time reſided; bleſſed him with riches and honor; gave him joy and happineſs in his children, more eſpecially in

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his ſon Iſaac; lengthened out his days to a good old age; gathered him to his fathers in peace; and received his departing ſpirit to the boſom of his love, where he has ever ſince remained, and where he ſhall remain, to enjoy the ſmiles, and ſing the praiſes, of God and the Redeemer, through eternal ages.

Happy Abraham! happy waſt thou, when once thou dwelt on earth. Though afflicted with inward weakneſs and infirmity, and though ſurrounded with outward trials and temptations; yet even then waſt thou happy in the friendſhip of thy God, in the ſweet manifeſtations of his love. But O! how happy, how inconceivably happy, art thou now! Now thou art free from ſin, free from all imperfection, free from even painful trial, free from every kind and degree of temptation! Thou now enjoyeſt the full and complete friendſhip of thy Father God!

Would we, my brethren, be alſo called the friends of God; would we enjoy the tokens of his friendſhip? The way is as open to us as it was to him. We muſt be followers of them, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promiſes. We muſt become the children of Abraham: We muſt exerciſe the ſame faith, the ſame love, the ſame obedience, the ſame ſelfdenial, the ſame confidence in God; and keep up the ſame communion with God, that Abraham did; then ſhall we, like him, be called *the friends of God.*

SERMON

SERMON XII.

The Friend of God.

JAMES ii. 23.

And he was called the friend of God.

ABRAHAM is one of the moſt illuſtrious perſonages, which we find in ſacred hiſtory. His character and conduct ſhine with a ſuperior luſtre. Few, if any, of mankind, deſerve to be more admired than he. His example is, in many reſpects, and on many accounts, worthy of our moſt careful imitation. Since Abraham was a mere man, a ſinful, imperfect creature, as we are, and ſince he enjoyed no external privileges and advantages for improvement in virtue and piety, ſuperior to thoſe we enjoy; why may we not equal him in every grace, and become as eminently the friends of God as he was? I obſerved, in the preceding diſcourſe, that the expreſſion, "he was called the friend of God," may be deſigned to denote either the love and affection which God had for Abraham, or that which Abraham had for God; in both

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theſe reſpects it is true, that Abraham was the friend of God; though perhaps it is the former of theſe that is particularly intended. It was, however, propoſed to conſider the words in each of thoſe views. In the former diſcourſe, we conſidered how God manifeſted his friendſhip to Abraham, or diſcovered that he was his friend. We may now conſider,

II. How Abraham manifeſted his friendſhip to God.

You will ſtill retain this idea of friendſhip, that it is love, pure, genuine, unfeigned love, real affection and eſteem, for a perſon or being. It is the cordial agreement, harmony, or union of ſouls. To ſay, then, that Abraham manifeſted his friendſhip to God, by his love to him, is only ſaying, that he manifeſted his love by his love, his friendſhip by his friendſhip, or that he was a friend to God.

The apoſtle James will anſwer the queſtion before us in ſhort, and tell us how it was that Abraham manifeſted his friendſhip for God, and how he obtained the honorable character, which is given to him in the text. He ſays, "Was not Abraham our father juſtified by works, when he had offered Iſaac his ſon upon the altar? Seeſt thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the ſcripture was fulfilled which ſaith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteouſneſs: And he

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was called the friend of God." It ſeems, then, that in the view of St. James, Abraham manifeſted his friendſhip to God, and that he obtained this honorable character, to be called the friend of God, by his faith, or by his faith and obedience; by a faith which wrought with his works, and was made perfect by it. The only particular act of obedience which he mentions, is that of offering up his ſon, and ſo the only particular act or exerciſe of faith which he refers to, is that of his believing in the divine promiſe, that, "in him and in his ſeed, all nations ſhall be bleſſed;" or perhaps more particularly in that promiſe, "In Iſaac ſhall thy ſeed be called;" accounting that God was able to raiſe him up from the dead, and that he would do this, rather than his promiſe ſhould fail. But we are not to imagine, that it was only one exerciſe of faith, or one act of obedience, that gave Abraham this character of being the friend of God. His whole life, or his general conduct, proved that he was the friend of God. We may, therefore, derive advantage to ourſelves, from a more particular ſurvey of thoſe things in the life and conduct of Abraham, which manifeſted that he was a friend to God, that he really loved and eſteemed God, and that he valued his favor and friendſhip above every thing elſe. There are many things in the life and conduct of Abraham, which deſerve particular notice. Here then we may obſerve, in the firſt place,

1. That

1. That Abraham manifeſted his love to God, or his affection and friendſhip for him, by a cheerful obedience to his commands.

Abraham had the ſame general commands to obey, and the ſame common duties to perform, that we and all others have. Theſe he performed, we may ſuppoſe, with carefulneſs and fidelity, and with uncommon alacrity, which was one reaſon, why God put his obedience to ſuch peculiar trials, that ſo he might ſtand upon record, as an eminent and illuſtrious example of obedience to all future generations. The particular and remarkable inſtances of his cheerful obedience to the divine command, which are recorded in the word of God, are two: That of leaving his native land, and that of offering up his beloved ſon a ſacrifice to God.

The firſt of theſe was a proof of his readineſs to obey the divine will. God ſaid to him, while dwelling with his friends and kindred, "Get thee out from thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's houſe, unto a land which I ſhall ſhew thee." This was the command; and what made it peculiarly trying was, that he was not only required to leave the only country with which he was acquainted, and all his kindred and friends, except ſuch as would accompany him; but to go he knew not where, nor how far. He muſt wholly give up himſelf to the divine guidance and direction, and follow wherever God ſhould lead. St. Paul ſays, "He went out, not knowing whither he went."

went." But Abraham obeyed the divine command, becauſe he knew God was acquainted with his true character, and was a real friend to him. He knew that God would not direct him to do any thing, which was not wiſe and good. He knew that God was his friend, that God would not baniſh him from himſelf, if he did from his earthly friends; and he was willing to go to any place, where God would go with him. By this, therefore, he manifeſted himſelf to be the friend of God.

The other inſtance of obedience required and performed was ſtill more ſingular and ſurpriſing. "Take now thy ſon, thine only ſon Iſaac, whom thou loveſt, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

How painful is this precept! Every word which God makes uſe of is enough to cut him to the heart. *Take now thy ſon*—not thy bullock, not thy lamb, not thy ſheep, not thouſands of rams; but take *thy ſon;* and this not Iſhmael, who had been caſt out and cut off from the family; but thine only ſon that is left, he on whom all thy hopes are built, in whom all the promiſes centre—that ſon whom *thou loveſt*, whom thou preferreſt to every earthly friend. And what is to be done with him? Why he muſt be offered up for a burnt offering; not barely ſent off and baniſhed from the family, which would have been painful indeed, though eaſy in compariſon with this; for then hope might have had ſomething to

reſt upon. But this is not the order—no, he muſt die, and not only die, but he muſt be offered up for a burnt offering, he muſt be conſumed to aſhes. Well, if it muſt be ſo, may not Abraham be allowed to commit him to ſome one as the executioner? No; the father muſt put him to death with his own hand; and he muſt do it after full deliberation and reflection; for he muſt go three days' journey with him, before he can reach the place of execution. Does he appear to heſitate whether to obey or not? No; he knew it was the command of God; he knew that he ought to obey, and he delays not a moment to execute the divine injunction. He riſes early in the morning after he had received the command, and ſteadily purſues the journey, with an unalterable and fixed reſolution to obey, until, on the third day, he comes in ſight of the place where the fatal ſcene was to be acted. Then, leaving his ſervants, he takes his ſon along with him to the deſtined ſpot; there he builds his altar, lays the wood in order, binds his ſon, lays him on the funeral pile. Now he ſtretches out his hand and takes the knife. Still his heart does not fail him, nor his hand refuſe to perform the painful taſk—he is fixed in his reſolution to obey God, whatever it may coſt him. God accepts the will for the deed; he ſees his willing and obedient heart, he ſtays his hand, and preſents him with a ram, to be offered in the place of his ſon. The command was given to make trial of his obedience, the trial was made,

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and his obedience proved. It now appeared, that Abraham was indeed the friend of God, ſeeing he withheld not his ſon, his only ſon from him. Again,

2. Abraham manifeſted his friendſhip to God, by his faith and confidence in him.

Faith and confidence in another, is many times as ſtrong a proof of love and affection as any thing can be. Abraham was a true believer in God, and put the moſt implicit confidence in every thing which God ſaid. He believed that God was invariably faithful to his word; he believed that heaven and earth ſhould paſs away, and the whole courſe of nature change, ſooner than God's word ſhould fail. This faith and confidence in God Abraham diſcovered on all occaſions, however unlikely, or even impoſſible to human view it ſeemed, that his word ſhould be accompliſhed. It was this faith and confidence in God, which induced him to leave his native land. So ſays the apoſtle to the Hebrews. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he ſhould after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and went out, not knowing whither he went." Though God, when he called him, did not particularly tell what land he would give him; yet it ſeems he had made ſome promiſe to him of an inheritance, and he believed that God would give it, confiding in his goodneſs as well as faithfulneſs. By faith he ſojourned in the land of promiſe, as

in a ſtrange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Iſaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the ſame promiſe; for he looked for a city which hath foundations whoſe builder and maker is God." Abraham not only believed the promiſe, that his ſeed ſhould inherit the land of Canaan; but he conſidered this land as a type of heaven, and believed that he ſhould inherit this alſo. His faith was again tried in the promiſe of a ſon by Sarah in his old age. This, according to the common courſe of nature, was impoſſible; but he knew and believed the power and faithfulneſs of God. And we are told, "being not weak in faith, he conſidered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadneſs of Sarah's womb: He ſtaggered not at the promiſe of God through unbelief; but was ſtrong in faith, giving glory to God."

But the greateſt trial of his faith was that which was the greateſt trial of his obedience. "By faith, ſays the apoſtle, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Iſaac: And he that had received the promiſes, offered up his only begotten ſon; of whom it was ſaid, that in Iſaac ſhall thy ſeed be called." This was indeed a trial of his faith. How was it poſſible, that all the promiſes which God had made him of a numerous poſterity ſhould be fulfilled? And eſpecially how was it poſſible, that this promiſe in particular ſhould be fulfilled in Iſaac, if he were put to death in his youth? Where would

would be any room for faith? On what could faith be founded? Would it not be folly, preſumption, and even madneſs, to expect that a numerous poſterity ſhould ſpring from a dead child? But Abraham knew that the promiſe was abſolute, and he was equally certain that God was faithful; he therefore believed God, accounting that God was able to raiſe him up from the dead, even from the aſhes of a burnt offering; and that he would do it, ſooner than his promiſe ſhould fail. Abraham's faith, therefore, proved him to be a friend to God—one that relied on his power and goodneſs, his truth and faithfulneſs; one who would confide in God, and againſt hope believe in hope.

3. Abraham's friendſhip to God was manifeſted, by a courſe of cheerful ſubmiſſion and ſelfdenial.

Nothing was too dear to him to be parted with for God. He was willing to part with father and mother, kindred and friends, and even with his beloved ſon, who was dear to him as his own ſoul, whenever God required it. Did he ever murmur and complain at the will of God? Did he ever manifeſt a reluctance at parting with any thing, which God called for? No; he appeared to be all ſubmiſſion: Not my will, but thine be done, was the language of all his conduct! What painful trials did he meet with! and with what meekneſs and humble ſubmiſſion, did he bear them! By ſuch conduct, he made it appear, that he regarded the divine will more than his own private good, and

that he was a true, ſincere, diſintereſted friend to God.

4. Abraham manifeſted his friendſhip to God, by his daily and intimate converſe and communion with him.

Friends love to meet and converſe together; and they take every convenient opportunity to viſit each other. As God manifeſted his friendſhip for Abraham, by frequent viſits, by repeated promiſes, and by endearing communications; ſo Abraham manifeſted his friendſhip for God, by his frequent and intimate converſe with him. It is true, there is no particular mention made how often Abraham was employed in prayer and praiſe, and other religious devotions, in which the pious ſoul has communion with God, and keeps up an intimacy with him; yet there is enough ſaid to make it evident, that Abraham was a man of prayer, and that he was no ſtranger to communion with God. We find him engaged in this duty himſelf, and enjoining it upon others. At his firſt entrance into the promiſed land, he came to the place called Sichem, and there the Lord appeared unto him, and ſaid, "Unto thy ſeed will I give this land;" and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the eaſt of Bethel, and there he builded an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord. From this place he went down into Egypt, becauſe of a famine in the land; but he ſoon returned to

Bethel,

Bethel, where he had before built an altar; and there, we are told, he again called on the name of the Lord. At length, he removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built an altar there unto the Lord. In every place where he dwelt, he built an altar, and called on the name of the Lord. It is clearly evident, therefore, that he was a man of real piety and devotion; a man of prayer; one who kept up a conſtant communion with God. Several of his prayers are mentioned; and there is one in particular, which you can never forget, his fervent interceſſion for Sodom. Such faith, obedience, and ſubmiſſion, as he often exerciſed, could not be maintained, without prayer. And his prayers and devotions proved him to be the ſincere and intimate friend of God.

5. Abraham clearly manifeſted his friendſhip to God, by his faithful endeavors to promote his cauſe among men.

It is the part of true friends to eſpouſe each other's cauſe, to make the intereſt of each other their own. As God manifeſted his friendſhip to Abraham, by taking his part, and eſpouſing his cauſe; ſo Abraham manifeſted his friendſhip to God, by profeſſing and promoting true religion among men.

Abraham not only paid a ſacred regard to the commands and laws of God himſelf, but he endeavored to bring others to do the ſame. Hence,

God ſays of him, "I know him, that he will command his children, and his houſehold after him, and they ſhall keep the way of the Lord, to do juſtice and judgment." Abraham not only took pains to teach his children and ſervants the knowledge of God and his ways; but he exerted all his authority over his houſehold, to oblige them to do juſtice and judgment. This was a bright part of Abraham's character; it was greatly to his honor, and very evidential of his friendſhip to God. Thus did Abraham in every way manifeſt his love to God, and his regard for his honor and intereſt in the world. It is true, that Abraham's love, notwithſtanding the great trials it endured, and the aſtoniſhing acts, which it led him to perform, was imperfect. Abraham was guilty of ſome great ſins. "There is not a juſt man upon earth, that doeth good, and ſinneth not." But ſtill he is an eminent and illuſtrious example to ſaints in every age; and in him we learn, not only what is our duty, and how we ought to conduct towards God; but how, like him, we may obtain the honorable character of being the friends of God, and how we may ſecure the bleſſing of that glorious and all perfect Being.

And now, let me aſk you, my brethren, whether you are the friends or the enemies of God? Whether you are in heart reconciled to God, to his laws and providence? And whether you manifeſt your friendſhip to him, as Abraham did?

Does

Does your love to God, and your friendſhip for him, appear in your cheerful obedience to all the intimations of his will? You have not been called to ſuch painful and trying acts of obedience as Abraham was; the ſtrength of your love has not been tried by a command, to forſake every thing for God; yet you have met with many things in the courſe of life to try you, whether you would ſubmit to God and obey his will. Have you then been obedient? Have you been ready to perform the moſt ſelf denying duties? Have you had reſpect to all the divine commands, and been diſpoſed to ſay, All that the Lord our God requires, we will do, and be obedient? You may have ſometimes tranſgreſſed. Abraham did. But do you feel a heart to obey? Have you an obediential temper? Is it the deſire of your heart, and the endeavor of your life, to obey the will of God?

Have you manifeſted, and do you manifeſt, your love and friendſhip to God, by your faith and confidence in him? Do you rely and depend, with the moſt implicit confidence, on his word, believing all that he has ſaid, and looking for the accompliſhment and fulfilment of all his promiſes, and of all his threatenings? Do you believe in the Son of God, the Savior of ſinners, and rely upon him for pardon and eternal life; and in the belief of God's word, do you live in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, has promiſed?

Do

Do you, like Abraham, diſcover your friendſhip to God, by a cheerful and entire ſubmiſſion to his providence? Have you given up yourſelves, and your all, to his abſolute diſpoſal? Are you willing that God ſhould order all your circumſtances in life, and can you part with your deareſt friends and comforts, at his call, without murmuring or repining?

Do you manifeſt your love to God, your friendſhip for him, and your delight in him, by a daily and frequent intercourſe and communion with him? There is nothing, perhaps, more evidential of love and friendſhip, than a pleaſing and endearing converſe and communion. It is in this way, that friends do, as it were, interchange hearts, and give each other the ſtrongeſt expreſſions of mutual confidence, love, and eſteem. Have you this evidence of friendſhip to God? Do you draw near to God? Do you delight in coming into his preſence? Do you keep up a daily and delightful intercourſe and communion with him? Have you your altar for morning and evening ſacrifice in your houſes? Are your families witneſſes of your devotions, and called to join in them? And do you find communion with God in your devotions? How can you think, that you are the friends of God, if you neglect prayer; if you do not converſe with God; or if you live as without God in the world? Do you thus neglect your earthly friends? Be not deceived, God is not mocked; he

he cannot be deceived by your empty profeſſions. He knows the heart; he knows whether the deſire of your ſoul be towards him, and whether you really delight in maintaining a friendly intercourſe and communion with him. Once more: Do you manifeſt your friendſhip to God, by endeavoring to promote his cauſe and intereſt in the world? Are you careful to teach and command your families to keep the commands of God, and to do juſtice and judgment? Do you wiſh that the cauſe of God might flouriſh; and do you endeavor to promote it, by your prayers, your example, your counſels and inſtructions, and, as far as your influence extends, by your authority? Theſe queſtions may help you to determine, whether you are the real friends of God, or hearty enemies to him. If you are the friends of God, you are, and you will be happy. God is your friend. And how happy are thoſe, who have God for their friend, and exceeding great reward! But how dreadful is the condition of thoſe, who are enemies to God! God is as awful and terrible to his enemies, as he is amiable and kind to his friends. As though, therefore, God did beſeech you by us, we pray you, in Chriſt's ſtead, be ye reconciled to God.

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

Self Knowledge, or Acquaintance with our own Hearts

PSALM iv. 4.

Commune with your own heart.

WE find ourſelves this moment in the houſe of God! Yet, ſuch ſtrange, inconſiderate creatures are we, that, it is more than probable, there are ſome here preſent, who have not once ſeriouſly thought of their being in the houſe of God. Though ſome ſerious, ſolemn duties have been already performed, yet ſome may have paid no real attention to them, nor once have conſidered, whether they had any concern in them, or not. It is certain, therefore, that ſome men do not really know, at certain times, what is done, or ſaid, or what takes place, in their immediate preſence. We commonly ſay, that they are inattentive—the truth is, they are attending to ſomething elſe. The eye often calls up the mind to ſome object, which preſents itſelf to view, and which ſo entirely engroſſes the attention, that, although the ear hears the

ſound

ſound of a voice ſpeaking, yet it conveys no idea to the mind. At another time, the ear engages the attention of the mind ſo abſolutely, that the eye can make no impreſſion on it. The eye and the ear convey to us moſt of our ideas of material objects. But there is another way, by which the mind furniſhes itſelf with many important ideas, that is, by meditation, or reflection; when the mind does, as it were, ſhut itſelf up, and pay no attention to the objects which the eye beholds, or which the ear hears. Hence, we are ſometimes ſurpriſed to find a man in ſuch a deep ſtudy, as we call it, or ſo much engaged in thinking upon ſome ſubject, that he ſeems not to ſee the objects that are immediately before him, nor to hear the words that are immediately addreſſed to him. But when this is the caſe, the mind is either attending to ſome object or enjoyment, which the eye has before ſeen, or which the ear has before heard of; or attending to ſome mere creature of the imagination. But there is another (I had almoſt ſaid, divine) power, which the mind has, of ſhutting out from itſelf all the objects and enjoyments, which the bodily ſenſes have ever preſented to it, and of turning its attention inward upon itſelf, and contemplating its own powers, capacities, and exerciſes, or, in the language of the text, "communing with itſelf." When the pſalmiſt directs us to commune with our own hearts, the direction is, to turn off our attention from every other object and enjoyment, and

fix

fix it wholly upon what paſſes within us. This excellent capacity man has, and it is peculiar to man; that is, in this, man is diſtinguiſhed from all the other creatures, that inhabit this earth, with which only we are acquainted. A very little attention to ourſelves will convince us, that we are different beings from the beaſts, birds, fiſhes, worms, and inſects, of this earth, not only in the form and faſhion of our bodies; but ſtill more in the powers and capacities of our minds, or in that ſpirit which dwells in and animates the body. Though the moſt of theſe creatures appear to have a kind and degree of knowledge, and thought; yet it is very evident, that their knowledge is vaſtly different in nature and kind, as well as degree, from ours.

To have our whole attention, therefore, fixed on external objects and enjoyments, is to act unworthy our character, as rational and accountable creatures. Nothing ſo much demands our attention, as our own hearts; and yet, I preſume, nothing is ſo greatly and generally neglected. Hence it is, that mankind in general are not only ſtrangers to their own hearts, but ſtrangers to human nature. For there is really no ſuch thing as knowing human nature, but by becoming intimately acquainted with our own hearts. Human nature is not learned, by ſeeing men's bodies, or hearing their voices; (for theſe do not conſtitute human nature) but by knowing the heart of man; for it is the heart

that

that makes the man, or determines what he is. But how can we know the hearts of others? I anſwer, by knowing our own hearts; for, as in water face anſwers to face, ſo the heart of man to man. All mankind have the ſame nature; and it may be ſaid, in one ſenſe, that the hearts of all men are the ſame; that is, by nature all are equally corrupt and ſinful. It is true, that one man is naturally more inclined to one particular ſin, or to one particular way of manifeſting or acting out the wickedneſs of his heart, and another, to another; but ſtill they all poſſeſs the ſame corrupt heart, until, by the power and grace of God, it is renewed. This, I know, many are unwilling to allow; but the only reaſon is, they are ſtrangers to their own hearts. I do not mean, that all men are equally wicked, though it be equally true of all, that their hearts are corrupt and ſinful; for it is an undoubted truth, that ſome men increaſe in wickedneſs much faſter than others; ſome are under much greater reſtraints than others; and ſome diſcover their wickedneſs by overt acts of ſin, while others conceal it within themſelves. But the word of God, which certainly is true, repreſents all mankind as, by nature, the ſame fallen, corrupt, and ſinful creatures. And this every man would ſee and feel to be the truth, if he was really acquainted with his own heart: And this acquaintance with his own heart he might have, if he would really and faithfully commune with it. We become acquainted with others, by

frequent

frequent and intimate communion with them, by ſeeing and obſerving them in different ſituations and circumſtances, and by carefully attending to their words and actions. A man may be frequently in company with another, may ſee and hear him converſe often; yet, if he be not particularly attentive to him, if he does not carefully obſerve him, if he is not diſpoſed to look as it were into him, and find out what he is, he will be a ſtranger to his real temper and diſpoſition. The ſame may be ſaid with reſpect to ourſelves. It is not a very eaſy matter to gain a real and intimate acquaintance with our own hearts: And few people are really diſpoſed to get this acquaintance. There is nothing more generally neglected by mankind, than their own hearts. In this ſenſe, they are ſeldom, if ever, at home. Their attention is taken up with the world and the things of it. Their thoughts are employed, even when their hands are idle, about the riches, the honors, or pleaſures of this life. Preſent objects and enjoyments ſwallow up their whole time. In conſequence of this, they remain ignorant of themſelves, and unacquainted with their own hearts. In order to become acquainted with our own hearts, we muſt commune with them, that is, we muſt carefully attend to them, at all times and under all circumſtances. We muſt watch them carefully, examine them critically, and judge of them impartially, by the unerring rule of God's word. This is the only ſure rule, the only infallible

ſtandard,

ſtandard, and this will never deceive us. Men certainly may become acquainted with themſelves; they may know their own hearts; they may know what paſſes within them, as well as what paſſes without them. They can always find their hearts, for they are always at hand.

But it may be objected, that the prophet Jeremiah ſays, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked; who can know it?" It is true, the heart is wicked, exceedingly ſo, and it is alſo deceitful, and men are often deceived by it; but this is principally owing to their inattention to it, to their quick and haſty determinations reſpecting it. Men are ſtrangers to their own hearts, and therefore are continually liable to be deceived by them: But the man who daily watches his own heart, carefully obſerves what paſſes there, and tries his thoughts and feelings by the word of God, will ſoon become acquainted with the treachery of his heart, and will not be deceived by it. The more corrupt and wicked the heart is, and the more deceitful it is, the more need there is of paying a conſtant attention to it, keeping the ſtricteſt watch over it, and attentively obſerving all its motions. If we know a man to be deceitful, and have any concern with him, we always ſuppoſe it is proper and neceſſary to watch him more critically, and obſerve him more narrowly, on that account. This certainly ought to be the caſe with reſpect to our own hearts; for deceit here is infinitely more haz-

ardous than in any other caſe. For man to deceive himſelf with reſpect to himſelf is, of all evils, the greateſt; ſince ſuch an one can never really know what he is, how he does act, nor in reality how he ought to act. Hence it is, that among all the creatures that exiſt, none act ſo abſurdly, ſo inconſiſtently, and ſo unworthily as man. Theſe may appear to ſome to be harſh expreſſions, and hard reflections on human nature; but commune with your own hearts, and, I am perſuaded, you will find them to be true reſpecting yourſelves. Let me then recommend to you this ſelf acquaintance, this attention to and communion with your own hearts, from the following conſiderations.

Without this attention to your own hearts, you never can know what creatures you are; how you ought to act; how you do act; or what will be the conſequence of your actions.

1. Without this attention to and communion with your own heart, you can never know what creatures you are. We have already obſerved, and a little attention will prove the obſervation juſt, that it is the heart, which makes the man, or forms his juſt and true character. It is not the form and ſhape of his body; it is not his bodily beauty or deformity; it is not the ſoftneſs and ſweetneſs, or harſhneſs of his voice; it is not his ſaying little or much; it is not his worldly poverty or wealth; it is not his being in or out of office among men; it is not his learning, or ignorance; that forms a man's moral,

moral, which is his real character: But it is his heart, or the inward temper and diſpoſition of his mind. This muſt be evident to every one, who views mankind, in the light in which God views them, which is undoubtedly a juſt light; that is, rational and moral agents, accountable creatures. Hence it appears, that he who is a ſtranger to his own heart, muſt be a ſtranger to his own character; he does not know himſelf, he does not know what a creature or being he is. He knows, indeed, that he is a rational creature; he knows what kind of body he has, and what his outward circumſtances are; and he may be ſo fooliſh as to think, that theſe things form his character. And, in truth, theſe things do form all the character that ſome men have in the view of others like themſelves, who forget that men have hearts, becauſe they have never attended to their own moral exerciſes. But if a man's real character depends on his heart, or is as his heart is, then he cannot know what a creature he is, without knowing what his heart is. Without attending to his own heart, he cannot know whether he has a ſinful heart, or a holy heart; whether he has an honeſt heart, or a deceitful heart, and yet upon this his true moral character depends. But it may be thought, that every man knows ſo much of himſelf, as to know he has a ſinful heart. I queſtion it. Every man may know, that he has been guilty of ſome ſins, that he has done thoſe things which the law of God forbids; but in viewing theſe ſins, he

looks not to his heart, but to the outward conduct only; he knows nothing about his heart. Hence it is, that ſo many deny the natural ſinfulneſs of the heart. And for the ſame reaſon, they entirely overlook the greateſt part of their guilt, which lies in the inward exerciſes of their hearts. Men are guilty, perhaps, of a thouſand ſins in the heart, to one in their outward conduct; and for want of attention to their hearts, they are ignorant of themſelves, and blind to the real criminality and turpitude of their characters. Hence it is, that many men think themſelves to be very different creatures from what they really are. This was the caſe of the Laodiceans, to whom Chriſt ſays, "Thou ſayeſt, I am rich, and increaſed with goods, and have need of nothing; and knoweſt not that thou art wretched, and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked." It is, therefore, abſolutely neceſſary, that we commune with our own hearts, in order to our knowing what creatures we are.

2. Without knowing our own hearts, we cannot know how we ought to act.

No man can know how he ought to act, and what he ought to be, who does not know what ſort of a creature he is, and what ſituation he is in. The man, who views himſelf as having exiſtence in this world only, and thinks nothing of his connection with another, will act only with reſpect to this world; and if, in fact, he was made only for this world, he would act right and conſiſtently with his

real

real character. But if man is made for immortality, if he has entered upon an endleſs exiſtence, if this world is only a ſtate of trial and probation for an unchangeable and eternal ſtate, then certainly all his conduct ought to be directed to that ſtate; and he who acts only for this world acts out of character, acts inconſiſtently.

Furthermore; if we allow that every man does know, that he is made for immortality, and ought to live for another world, without any great attention to or examination of his own heart; yet it is certain, that many do not live and act for eternity, that is, as they ought to; nor can they, without a particular acquaintance with their own hearts. For, without this knowledge of their own hearts, they cannot know what thoſe duties are, which they ought to perform. He who is ignorant what manner of perſon he is, cannot know how ſuch a perſon as he is ought to act. He who is unacquainted with his own ſinful heart, cannot feel his obligation to repent of all his ſins, and turn from them unto God. A man can never feel his obligations to repent of ſins, which he is not conſcious of committing. He muſt ſee and feel his guilt, before he will ever caſt himſelf at the foot of an offended God, and own that he deſerves his wrath and curſe forever. He muſt ſee his own heart, before he can feel his need of Chriſt; for "the whole need not a phyſician, but they that are ſick." It is owing to this ignorance or unacquaintedneſs with

their own hearts, that moſt men are ſo entirely unacquainted with the nature of religion, and think that all they have to do is, to attend to ſome external acts of duty, in which the heart is never engaged. But let them once become acquainted with their own hearts, and they will immediately ſee what they have to do, and how they ought to act. They will then ſee what now they cannot perceive, that they have much to do with their own hearts; that every thing depends on the heart, and that nothing is of any avail, unleſs the heart be in it. It is therefore impoſſible, that any one ſhould know how he ought to act, and what he has to do, without an acquaintance with his own heart. Nor,

3. Can he know how he does act, without knowing his own heart.

As a man's character depends upon his heart, and is as his heart is; and as duty primarily and eſſentially reſpects the heart; ſo he can never know what his conduct is, or how he really acts, without knowing what are the exerciſes of his heart. An action is morally good or evil, duty or ſin, according to the temper and diſpoſition of the heart from which it proceeds. How then can any man know whether he has done duty in any action, unleſs he knows the temper and diſpoſition of his heart, with which the action is performed, or from which it proceeds? Many are ignorant what their conduct is, becauſe ignorant of their own hearts. Indeed, very few know what their actions are.

And,

And, perhaps, thoſe who are the leaſt attentive to their own hearts, and the leaſt acquainted with themſelves, are the moſt confident of the goodneſs of their own actions. It is for want of an acquaintance with their own hearts, and the real temper and diſpoſition with which they act, that a great part of mankind think they are doing God ſervice, when they are acting very wickedly. Hence many deceive themſelves with the thought, that they are acting well, and going in the way of life, while they are walking in the broad road to deſtruction. This leads me to add,

4. That without knowing our own hearts, we cannot know what will be the conſequence of our actions.

If we knew our own hearts, and knew the nature of our actions, we might know the final conſequence of our conduct. God has plainly told us in his word, what the conſequence of every action will be; that is, he has told us, that "the wages of ſin is death," and that ſin, unrepented of and unforſaken, will be puniſhed in "the lake which burneth with fire and brimſtone." And he has plainly and certainly told us, that "he that believeth ſhall be ſaved," and whoever "is born again ſhall ſee the kingdom of heaven" If, therefore, we can ſo far know our own hearts, as to know that we are in a ſtate of ſin, then we may know that we are in a ſtate of condemnation, and that the wrath of God abideth on us. But if, on

the contrary, we know that we are renewed after the image of God, and have the ſpirit of the goſpel, then we may know that we are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Chriſt, and be aſſured of our preſent good eſtate, and of our final ſalvation.

How important, then, is the direction in the text: "Commune with your own heart." Would you know what you are—how you ought to act—how you do act—and what will be the conſequence of all your conduct, commune with your own hearts; examine them critically and impartially; compare them with the word of God; and look to Him, who knows them perfectly, and fervently pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and ſee if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlaſting."

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

Joy for the Happineſs of Others.

LUKE xv. 9.

And when ſhe hath found it, ſhe calleth her friends and neighbors together, ſaying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had loſt.

THE parable of the loſt piece of money, and the preceding one of the loſt ſheep, were both (you will probably recollect) ſpoken by our Lord, as a reproof of the Scribes and Phariſees, for their murmuring and complaining at his conduct, in receiving ſinners, and eating with them. Both theſe parables are deſigned to teach us, not only that there is joy in heaven for the converſion of a ſinner; but that it is our duty alſo to rejoice in ſuch an event; yea, that it is our duty to rejoice in all the comfort and happineſs of others. He, who found the ſheep which he had loſt, called together his friends and neighbors, and ſaid unto them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my ſheep which was loſt." And the woman, who had loſt

loſt and found her piece of money, did the ſame. It is an addition to the joy of any one, to have others ſhare with him in his joy. And thoſe who had found their loſt goods ſeem to take it for granted, that their friends and neighbors would rejoice with them. This, you may ſay, was naturally to be expected; for who would not rejoice with his neighbor, that had found any thing which he had loſt? But let me aſk, in my turn, Does every one do this? Does every one rejoice in the good of his neighbor? Far from it! There are many, who ſeem to grieve at the good of others; who envy them their comfort and happineſs; and who ſeem to be unhappy themſelves, merely becauſe others enjoy more than they. But our text, in connection with the parable, and our Saviour's expoſition of it, clearly teaches us this important truth:

That it is the duty of every one to rejoice in all the good and happineſs of others.

Reaſon and revelation will both conſpire to eſtabliſh the truth of this obſervation, however repugnant it may be to the ſelfiſh feelings of thoſe, whoſe hearts know *no joy*, but what ariſes from perſonal good.

It is abundantly evident, that the angels of heaven, thoſe perfectly holy and benevolent beings, do not only rejoice in the glory and felicity, which they themſelves enjoy in the immediate preſence of God; but alſo in all that happineſs, which is diffuſed through heaven and earth. Their higheſt pleaſure, their greateſt joy is that, which ariſes

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from the honor and glory of God; next to this, they rejoice moſt in the greateſt good and happineſs of his creatures. Hence it was, that when God laid the foundations of the earth, and began the creation of this world, theſe morning ſtars ſang together, and all the ſons of God ſhouted for joy. They rejoiced that the ſcale of happineſs was enlarged, and a new and extenſive ſource of good opened. So again, when the Savior of the world was born, and a particular angel was ſent to inform the ſhepherds of this moſt auſpicious and happy event, not only did this particular angel exult with joy in being the happy meſſenger of ſuch good tidings, ſaying, "Fear not, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which ſhall be to all people;" but a vaſt multitude of the heavenly hoſt, tranſported with the moſt lively joy on this happy event, came to ſhew their moſt cordial congratulations, and with a glowing ardor joined in a general ſong of praiſe, ſaying, with united voices, "Glory to God in the higheſt, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Theſe are not the only inſtances which prove, that angels rejoice in the good of others. Our Lord aſſures us, in our context, that there is joy in heaven, joy among the angels of heaven, over one ſinner that repenteth; that not a ſingle ſinner can be converted from the error of his ways, and brought home to God, and to an intereſt in the benefits of the Redeemer's death, but thoſe amiable ſpirits rejoice in it. Their

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joy is increaſed, their happineſs is enlarged, by the increaſe of good to a ſingle individual! And for the ſame reaſon, notwithſtanding their high and glorious exaltation, they are pleaſed with being miniſtering ſpirits to mankind, and are happy in being the inſtruments of good to thoſe, who are the heirs of ſalvation. Now, if ſuch be the diſpoſition of theſe dignified ſpirits, if ſuch be their joy and pleaſure, and ſuch their gratitude and *praiſe* to God for the good and happineſs of others; ſurely it muſt be our duty to feel and expreſs the ſame benevolent diſpoſition. It will certainly be an honor to us to imitate and reſemble theſe bleſſed ſpirits.

And if we attend to the character of the beſt of men, as it is delineated in the ſacred ſcriptures, we ſhall find, that they always rejoiced more in public, than in private, bleſſings; and that they dreaded and deprecated public judgments and calamities far more, than thoſe which were private and perſonal. Thus Moſes, when God was angry with his people, and threatened to blot out their name from under heaven, and to make of him and of his family a favorite people for himſelf, fervently prays, that God would rather ſpare them, and blot him out of his book. So David, when God was viſiting his people with judgments, prays that God would ſpare them, and let his judgments fall on him and on his houſe. St. Paul ſays, that he could wiſh himſelf accurſed from Chriſt, for his brethren

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his kinſmen according to the fleſh; and that he had great heavineſs and continual ſorrow in his heart for their unbelief. He expreſſes the ſame ſpirit in all his epiſtles; for he every where gives thanks to God for all the ſpiritual gifts and graces beſtowed, either on the churches in general, or on particular members: And it was this love to the happineſs of others, which made the apoſtle, and which makes every good man, willing to deny himſelf, and ſuffer perſonal inconvenience, pain, and trouble, in order to relieve the diſtreſſes and promote the happineſs of his fellow creatures. In a word, ſo univerſally amiable is the man, who intereſts himſelf in the good and happineſs of others; who rejoices in all the happineſs of the world around him; and who is willing to do any thing, or to ſuffer any thing, for the public good; I ſay, ſo univerſally amiable is ſuch a man, that even the writers of novels and romances, who would delineate the moſt perfect characters, find it neceſſary to make their Hero poſſeſs and diſplay this benevolent diſpoſition. Every man, however different his own character may be, is always pleaſed and delighted with one, who rejoices with thoſe that rejoice, and who weeps with thoſe that weep—who enters into the feelings of others, and partakes with them in their joys and ſorrows. Every man would have others feel and do ſo towards him; and is not the plain language of all this, "Go thou, and do likewiſe." What one maxim, what one direc-

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tion is there, that comes more home to the conſcience of every man, and carries more conviction with it than this ; " What ye would that others ſhould do to you, do ye even the ſame to them ?" Hence it muſt be the duty of every one to rejoice in the good of others.

But in order, if poſſible, to ſet the truth of this obſervation in a clear, familiar, and convincing light, it may not be amiſs to conſider the reaſonableneſs of one perſon's rejoicing in the good of another. Here then let it be obſerved,

1. That happineſs is in itſelf deſirable to all, and therefore we ought to rejoice in the happineſs of all.

That happineſs is in itſelf deſirable, we need no other proof than that which every man finds and feels in his own breaſt. It is a ſelf evident truth; and to offer any labored arguments to prove it, would be an affront to common ſenſe. But if happineſs be deſirable in its own nature, and we all deſire it for ourſelves, why ſhould we not deſire it for others ? Or if we rejoice in our own happineſs, why ſhould we not rejoice in the happineſs of others ? For,

2. The happineſs of others is as important as our own happineſs.

If every man does not feel the truth and importance of this obſervation, it is not becauſe it is not as true as the former, but becauſe he is too much ſwallowed up in himſelf to feel any thing, which does

does not immediately reſpect himſelf. His reaſon and conſcience, however, will convince him, if he will but attend to their dictates, that the happineſs of another is as important as his own. Happineſs is not deſirable merely becauſe *it is mine* ; but becauſe it is, in itſelf conſidered, a good, a deſirable object. Self, therefore, has nothing to do with the real nature of an object or enjoyment ; that is, ſelf does not increaſe or diminiſh the real worth and excellency of it, though it often does our joy or complacency in it. The happineſs of another, is as truly happineſs, as if I enjoyed it ; and the greatneſs of this happineſs is the ſame, whether I enjoy it, or another.

It is one perfection of the Deity, that he is no reſpecter of perſons ; that he has an invariable regard to the general and greateſt good of his creatures. Who can wiſh to be the only object of divine favor, to enjoy every thing himſelf, to engroſs all good ? Is it not ſuitable, that God ſhould confer happineſs and beſtow favors upon others as well as upon us ? If others are capable of enjoying happineſs as well as we, why ſhould not their happineſs be as important as our own, and why ſhould not we rejoice in their happineſs as truly as in our own ? It is poſſible that the happineſs of another may be more important than our own ; and therefore we ought to rejoice in it more than our own. When I ſay, the happineſs of another *may be* more important than our own; it may perhaps appear a

ſtrange

ſtrange aſſertion; but, conſider a moment; is not the happineſs of a man of more importance than the happineſs of a beaſt? Yes, certainly; for a man is of more value than many beaſts or ſparrows. The happineſs of a man is a rational happineſs, but that of a beaſt is merely animal—the happineſs of a man is much greater than that of a beaſt, and therefore the happineſs of a man is a much greater cauſe of joy, than that of a beaſt. Ought we not then to rejoice more in the happineſs of a man, than in that of a beaſt? Yes, certainly; and why? Becauſe it is of more worth and value; not becauſe of any perſonal intereſt in either. For the ſame reaſon, the happineſs of one man may be of more conſequence and importance, than that of another man; his happineſs may be more rational, as well as greater in degree, than that of another; and therefore ought to be more rejoiced in. Every man is capable of feeling happineſs; but every man is not capable of feeling an equal degree of happineſs. But in proportion as men are capable of feeling and enjoying happineſs, and in proportion to the nature and kind of their happineſs, in the ſame proportion is their happineſs to be rejoiced in. We all know, that one particular object or enjoyment will contribute more to the happineſs of another, than it will to our own; therefore we ought to rejoice more that another poſſeſſes it, than if we poſſeſſed it ourſelves, becauſe hereby the general good is increaſed. Hence it

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is, that benevolent minds rejoice in the happineſs of others; yea, that they are willing, in many inſtances, to ſuffer for their good. And hence it is, that we are required to give to him that needeth; to feed the hungry; and to clothe the naked. What we impart of our good things to ſuch, will more increaſe their comfort and happineſs, than it will diminiſh our own; yea, if we are truly benevolent, it will augment our own perſonal happineſs. This leads me to obſerve,

3. That another reaſon, why we ſhould rejoice in the good and happineſs of others, is, that in this way we become partakers with others in their happineſs.

The good man, whoſe heart rejoices in the good and happineſs of others, has a perpetual ſource of the moſt pure and refined felicity. He can at all times look around him, and ſee happineſs and rejoice in it. If he has not himſelf every enjoyment that he could wiſh, yet he finds one and another poſſeſſing ſome deſirable enjoyments, and rejoicing in them; and when he conſiders that they are as dear and important to others as they would be to himſelf, his ſoul enters into the joys of others, and he rejoices with them in all their happineſs. In the exerciſe of ſuch a benevolent temper, the good man does, as it were, participate the joys of ſaints and angels in heaven. When he reflects upon the pure and ſublime pleaſures and enjoyments of thoſe holy beings above, his heart rejoices with

them, in all their felicity and bleſſedneſs. For the ſame reaſon, and in the ſame way, he participates the joys of the world around him, and ſhares in all the happineſs which they poſſeſs. He is pleaſed with the thought of that goodneſs, which fills heaven and earth; and his benevolent heart gives thanks to God for all the happineſs beſtowed upon his creatures. The ſacred Scripture, and in particular the Book of Pſalms, is full of praiſe, not only for perſonal favors, but for God's goodneſs to all. And St. Paul in all his epiſtles gives thanks to God, for all ſpiritual bleſſings, in particular, beſtowed on all the ſaints. Now, theſe things prove that the benevolent ſoul not only rejoices in the good and happineſs of others, but does alſo, as it were, partake of the bleſſings which others enjoy, merely becauſe they are happy. The more our hearts rejoice in the good and happineſs of others, the more happy we muſt neceſſarily be. It is not the poſſeſſion or enjoyment of this or the other object, that makes men happy; but it is the heart that rejoices in univerſal happineſs. I may add,

4. It is our duty to rejoice in the good of others, becauſe herein we reſemble God himſelf.

The infinite goodneſs and love of the Deity cauſes him to delight in the good and happineſs of his creatures. It was this, that cauſed him to create ſo many beings capable of enjoying happineſs, and to make ſuch ample proviſion for their enjoyment of it. And he does, undoubtedly, in the courſe of his

his providence, conſult the greateſt good, not of an individual, but of the whole ſyſtem. He is not partial of his favors to me, or to another man; but he is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. And ſo far as any one reſembles God, he will rejoice, not only in favors conferred upon him, but in thoſe that are conferred upon others. He will rejoice in the greateſt good of the whole intelligent ſyſtem. Let us then cultivate this benevolent ſpirit, and learn to rejoice in the happineſs of all around us.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. From the ſubject we infer, that true love is diſintereſted; or, in other words, that the religion of the goſpel requires diſintereſted affection.

Mankind in general are almoſt entirely ſwallowed up in ſelf. They are concerned about only their own intereſt and happineſs. They know little of any other joy, than that which ariſes from perſonal good. They are greatly indifferent about the good and happineſs of others, if they can but enjoy happineſs themſelves; yea, many would be willing that others ſhould be miſerable, if their miſery would but turn to their own perſonal advantage. For this reaſon it is, that many will ſteal, cheat, defraud, and oppreſs others, to increaſe their own wealth. And for this alſo it is, that many are diſpoſed to injure and abuſe, afflict and diſtreſs

others, to procure ſome perſonal benefit to themſelves. But this is directly contrary to the ſpirit and genius of that goſpel, which teaches us to love our neighbors as ourſelves, and to do to others as we would that they ſhould do to us. He, who is poſſeſſed of this ſpirit, will be as truly concerned for his neighbor as for himſelf; and he will rejoice in his neighbor's good, as ſincerely as in his own. This is diſintereſted love—this is the religion of the goſpel.

2. The ſubject teaches us the evil of envying the happineſs of others, and of murmuring and complaining becauſe others enjoy more than we do, or becauſe they poſſeſs things which we do not poſſeſs.

This is the ſpirit and temper of many. They look round them, and ſee others in the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of things which they have not; and inſtead of rejoicing in their happineſs, they are the more miſerable on this account. They would, perhaps, be tolerably contented, with what they have, if no one were in a better ſituation; but becauſe others are more happy, they feel themſelves more miſerable. But why ſhould the happineſs of another make me more miſerable? Why ſhould I envy another thoſe enjoyments which contribute to his comfort? His happineſs is as important as mine, and perhaps more ſo; and his happineſs cannot diminiſh mine, unleſs I pleaſe to turn it into an object of envy, inſtead of joy. So far ought we to be from envying the proſperity of others, that we ought to rejoice

joice in it. If we are miſerable, we ought to rejoice that others are happy. It is, indeed, an old and common obſervation, "That miſery loves company." But, if this be true, it is a melancholy truth, and affords a ſtriking evidence of the corruption of the human heart. To love miſery is a diabolical temper; it is the ſame that prompted the devil to ſeduce mankind, becauſe he himſelf had loſt his honor, dignity, and happineſs. But is there not too much of this ſpirit and temper to be found in all our hearts? Do we not often feel a diſpoſition to complain, when we look round and ſee others happier than ourſelves? This is far from a chriſtian ſpirit. We ought rather to rejoice in all the happineſs, which we ſee a kind and bountiful Providence is pouring into the boſoms of our fellow men.

Suffer me to aſk, whether Lazaras ought not to have rejoiced, when he lay in poverty and pain, that all men were not in his wretched condition; and even that the rich man was able to fare ſumptuouſly every day? Suppoſe a number of malefactors are condemned to die; but at length, they are all pardoned but one, and he muſt ſuffer a painful and ignominious death. Shall he complain, becauſe others are pardoned, and he is not? Shall he wiſh them to ſuffer, merely becauſe he muſt? No, if he poſſeſſes a good heart, he will ſay, "I rejoice, that you have obtained a pardon; that your lives are ſpared; that you are reſtored to your

friends ; and that their hearts will be filled with joy on your account. I too could have wiſhed for a pardon ; but, though I muſt die, I rejoice that you can live. Your death could be of no advantage to me ; it could not eaſe me of one of my pains, nor in the leaſt degree leſſen the anguiſh of my heart. Live, then, and rejoice ; and let all rejoice with you." Would not ſuch a character and conduct be amiable ? Go, then, and do likewiſe. Rejoice with them that rejoice.

SERMON

SERMON XV.

The Hypocrite.

JOB, xxxvi. 13.

But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath.

THERE is no character more odious in the view of God and man, than that of a hypocrite; none againſt which there are more woes denounced in the word of God. It is true, a man may put on the maſk, and ſo conſtantly wear it and act under it, as never to be really diſcovered to be what he in fact is; that is, men may never diſcover him to be a hypocrite, and therefore may never deſpiſe him in this world. But no maſk can deceive God; no profeſſion can hide the heart from him. For the Lord ſeeth not as man ſeeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. Men may not only be deceived by the conduct of others, ſo as to think thoſe to be real ſaints, who are but painted hypocrites; but they may alſo think thoſe to be hypocrites, who are not, as Job's friends did with reſpect to

him. They accuſed Job of hypocriſy, and thought he was guilty of it, merely on account of the outward evils and calamities in which he was involved. They were as ignorant of the true character of God, as they were of Job's. They thought it inconſiſtent with the character of God, to bring a good man into ſuch troubles as they ſaw Job in, and therefore concluded that he muſt be a hypocrite. But they were deceived. Job was a good man, notwithſtanding all the evils that ſurrounded him. Elihu evidently ſuppoſes, that good men may meet with afflictions; but that theſe will do them good, will humble and reform them, and that then they will be removed; while thoſe who are not benefited by afflictions will be deſtroyed. Hence he ſays, "But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath." —"See, ſays one, the nature of hypocriſy. It lies in the heart, that is for the world and the fleſh, when the outſide ſeems to be for God and religion. Many that are ſaints in ſhew, and ſaints in word, are hypocrites in heart. That ſpring is corrupt, and there is an evil treaſure there. See alſo the miſchievouſneſs of it. Hypocrites heap up wrath. They are doing that every day which is provoking to God, and they will be reckoned with for it altogether in the great day. They treaſure up wrath againſt the day of wrath; their ſins are laid up in ſtore with God among his treaſures." Since, then, the ſin of hypocriſy is ſo great, and the end of it ſo awful, the ſubject demands the particular attention

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of every one, and more eſpecially of thoſe, who profeſs friendſhip to God and his ways. And though it belongs not to us to determine whether this, or the other man, is an hypocrite ; yet it belongs to every one of us to determine for himſelf, whether this be his own character. It will, therefore, be proper for us, in this diſcourſe, more particularly to point out the nature of hypocriſy, or to ſhow wherein it conſiſts ; and alſo the evil of it. Accordingly, I ſhall endeavor,

I. To delineate the character of an hypocrite, or ſhow in what hypocriſy conſiſts.

II. To ſhew the evil of it, or the awful and aggravated condemnation of hypocrites—"they heap up warth."

I. I am to delineate the character of an hypocrite, or ſhew wherein hypocriſy conſiſts.

And here I wiſh, if it were poſſible, ſo to deſcribe the character of an hypocrite, as that thoſe who are ſuch may ſee what they are ; and no longer build a hope upon a ſandy foundation, which the floods of divine wrath will finally ſweep away ; and ſo as likewiſe to afford comfort to the ſound believer. But how ſhall I do this ? Not by making the religious experiences of any man the ſtandard ; but by carefully attending to the character, as it is repreſented in the word of God. Here then we may obſerve,

1. That an hypocrite is one who profeſſes to be what he really and in fact is not. This is a ſhort

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and juſt definition of an hypocrite; and is no doubt what is generally, if not univerſally, underſtood to be the meaning of the word. There are hypocrites in things of this life, as well as in religion. When any one makes particular profeſſion of friendſhip for another, and yet in heart is not his friend; he is an hypocrite. But a hypocrite, in a religious ſenſe, is one who makes profeſſion or outward ſhow of religion, of love to God, of obedience to his will; and yet in heart is an enemy to God, and his ways. From whence it appears, that one who makes no profeſſion or pretence to religion, one who pays no regard to the external parts of religion, and does not pretend to do any religious duties, but indulges himſelf in ſins of omiſſion and commiſſion, and that in the view of the world; ſuch an one cannot, with propriety, be called a hypocrite; for he is an open and avowed enemy of God; he lives in the moſt open and daring rebellion againſt the Majeſty of heaven. Though all mankind are in fact divided into two eſſentially different claſſes, and are all either ſaints or ſinners, friends or enemies of God; yet ſinners or enemies of God, may again be divided into two other claſſes, namely, his *ſecret* and his *open* enemies. Thoſe are the *ſecret* enemies of God, who, under the maſk of friendſhip, under the external covering of religious profeſſions and outward duties, are heartily oppoſed to his character and government. And thoſe are his *open* enemies, who

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act out the wickedneſs of their hearts, and diſcover it in the wickedneſs of their lives. The former of theſe two kinds of ſinners are hypocrites, whoſe character we are more eſpecially to attend to in this diſcourſe. An hypocrite, then, is one who makes public profeſſion, or outward ſhow and appearance of religion, or who, at leaſt, performs ſome external duties, which God requires, but yet is not a real chriſtian at heart. Therefore,

2. An hypocrite is one, who, under the profeſſion of religion, or outward ſhow and appearance of it, is actuated, not by ſupreme love to God, but by ſome ſelfiſh and ſiniſter views and motives. The real chriſtian is one, whoſe heart is for God, one who loves God with ſupreme affection; who loves God more than the world and all things in it, more than his own life, yea, more than his own ſoul. And all the duties which he performs proceed from this principle of ſupreme love to God. He profeſſes religion, becauſe he feels it. He ſays openly that he loves God, becauſe the love of God is ſhed abroad in his heart. He devotes himſelf to the ſervice of God, becauſe he loves his ſervice; he feels in his heart that he loves his Maſter, and would not go out free. He obeys the divine commands, becauſe he delights in the law of God after the inward man. He has reſpect to all God's precepts, he eſteems them all to be right, and hates every falſe way. But the hypocrite, notwithſtanding

notwithſtanding all his fair profeſſions and formal duties, is corrupt at heart; his heart is not right with God, nor is he governed and actuated in what he does, by love to God, but by love to himſelf. All his profeſſions and performances proceed from ſome ſelfiſh principle. Some make a profeſſion of religion, and perform external duties, merely that they may be ſeen of men. This Chriſt ſaid was the caſe with the Phariſees, whom he calls hypocrites. They prayed ſtanding in the corners of the ſtreets, that they might be ſeen of men. They alſo gave alms from the ſame motive and in the ſame manner. And it has often been the caſe, that men have made profeſſion of religion, and performed many outward acts of duty, merely to recommend themſelves to others, that they might be thought to be good men, or that others might have the better opinion of them. Now ſuch are hypocrites in heart, whatever they may be in the view of the world. So are all thoſe, who make a profeſſion, or perform any outward duties of religion, becauſe it is the cuſtom or faſhion of the people among whom they live, or who do it to gain advantage to themſelves, or to their families. He alſo is an hypocrite, who makes a profeſſion of religion, and ſets himſelf to perform religious duties, merely out of fear of divine wrath, or to obtain heaven by his duties; for it is evident that his religion is merely ſelfiſh and mercenary. Inſtead of being actuated by ſupreme love to God, he is governed

ernedentirely by love to himſelf. This, it is abundantly evident, is only hypocriſy. This was the religion of the people of Iſrael, when they were terrified by the thunders of mount Sinai. Though they unanimouſly ſaid, all that the Lord commanded them, they would do, and be obedient; yet, in leſs than forty days, they made a calf and worſhipped it, and ſaid, "Theſe be thy gods, O Iſrael." So when they ſmarted under divine judgments, then they were full of promiſes and profeſſions. "When he ſlew them, then they ſought him; and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheleſs, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with God, neither were they ſtedfaſt in his covenant." Satan inſinuated, that the religion of Job was of this kind, merely ſelfiſh; but he was deceived with reſpect to the matter. It is to be feared, however, that the religion of many, if not of moſt, ariſes from no better ſource, than the hope of the divine favor, or the fear of the divine wrath. If this be the caſe with any, their religion is not the ſervice of God, but of themſelves; they are only hypocrites. I doubt not but there are many, who are wholly actuated by this principle of ſelf love, and who are deſtitute of true love to God, that yet think they are no hypocrites. Some really ſuppoſe, if they are ſincere in ſeeking heaven in

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the way of outward duty, which God has enjoined, they are acting right, though they are influenced altogether by self love. But they are in reality mere hypocrites; they are not the friends of God, but lovers of themselves. It is certain, that not only those who mean to deceive others, by their profession and external religious performances, are hypocrites; but those also who deceive themselves. Hence it is, that we find such expressions as these respecting hypocrites: "The hypocrite's hope shall perish. The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment. What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" From whence it appears, that hypocrites may have great and confident hopes of future happiness, and great joys arising from those hopes; and yet find themselves awfully disapppointed. "There is a generation, says Solomon, that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness." According to the word of God, therefore, all those persons are hypocrites, who assume the profession, and put on the outward garb and appearance of religion, and yet are not in heart friends to God. Hence Christ says of such, "They make clean the outside of the cup, and of the platter, but within are full of extortion and excess. They are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward. Outwardly they appear righteous unto men, but within are full of hypocrisy. They honor God with their lips, but their hearts are far

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from him." Hence it is evident, that hypocriſy conſiſts in profeſſing or pretending friendſhip to God, when the heart is not ſincere and upright with him. Or he is an hypocrite, who makes an outward ſhow of religion, and yet is not in heart a real chriſtian, or true friend to God.

But ſome may ſtill be diſpoſed to inquire, How ſhall I know whether I am an hypocrite or not? How ſhall I determine whether I am actuated by a ſupreme regard to God, or by love to myſelf? If men may not only deceive others, by a profeſſion of religion and the performance of external duties, but may deceive themſelves too; how ſhall I know whether this is not the caſe with me? This queſtion is important, and deſerves a ſerious and careful anſwer. And in anſwering it, I ſhall have further opportunity to give you the character of the hypocrite. Among others, we may mention the following marks of hypocriſy.

1. Hypocrites are more concerned to gain the approbation of men, than the approbation of God. The real chriſtian feels himſelf in the view of God, and realizes his all ſeeing and heart ſearching eye, in all his religious performances. Hence he is ever concerned about his heart in duty, and ſolicitous to have that right with God. He is not ſo much concerned about his words and actions, as about his thoughts and affections. He is not ſo much concerned about the expreſſions which he makes uſe of in prayer, as about the exerciſes of

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his heart. He is as careful to watch over his moſt ſecret thoughts and actions, as over his moſt public conduct. But the hypocrite is not ſo much afraid of ſecret ſin, as he is of that which is open, and expoſed to the view of men. He would not do any thing that the world can find fault with, he is afraid of the reproach of his fellow mortals, but he often indulges ſecret ſins. He is much concerned about what the world thinks and ſays of him, though but a little concerned about his heart, and what God thinks of it. But it is a ſmall thing to be judged of man's judgment. It is infinitely more important to ſecure the approbation of God than of man. And therefore it is a dark mark of hypocriſy, to be more concerned to approve ourſelves to men than to God.

2. Hypocrites are more concerned to perform public duties than private, and more concerned about the manner of duty than the matter. Hypocrites often neglect ſecret prayer, when they will not neglect to pray in public. They are concerned to pray well before men, when any thing will ſatisfy them in private. They can eaſily quiet themſelves with running over a mere form of prayer in ſecret, and ſaying a few words in haſte; when they would be aſhamed to pray in ſuch a manner before their family, or any of their fellow men. Nor is this all; they often feel much more engaged, much more lively in their public, than in their ſecret devotions. And for this reaſon, becauſe they

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are more concerned about the honor that cometh from men, than that which cometh from God only.

3. Hypocrites are often very exact in little matters, when they are careleſs about more important things. This Chriſt remarks in the conduct of the ſcribes and phariſees, who were hypocrites. "Wo unto you ſcribes and phariſees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and aniſe, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which ſtrain at a gnat, and ſwallow a camel." Hypocrites are apt to attend to external duties, to the modes and forms of religion, while they neglect the power and life of religion. They may be ſtated and conſtant in their morning and evening prayers, but ſcarcely think of God, the reſt of the day. They may very punctually attend public worſhip on the Sabbath, but neither retain nor practiſe the duties which they hear ſolemnly and plainly inculcated. And though they confeſs their ſins before God, yet they are much more affected with a ſenſe of guilt, on account of particular external ſins, than on account of the corruption and wickedneſs of their hearts. They are like a cake not turned. They are uneven and inconſiſtent in their views, and feelings, and conduct.

4. Hypocrites are more influenced by fear than by love. They are more apt to be engaged in religious duties, when their fears are alarmed, and

they queſtion their title to heaven, than when their hopes are bright and ſtrong. This is very different from the conduct of the real chriſtian. He is more influenced by love than by fear. Hence the greater his love, the more engaged he is in the duties of devotion. Love is a more conſtant principle than fear. This makes the ſincere chriſtian more ſteady and uniform in his religion, than the hypocrite. When the latter enjoys hope, and ſees no danger, he is cold, remiſs, and negligent in his religious duties, and often caſts off fear, and reſtrains prayer before God. Hence that demand of Job concerning the hypocrite, "Will he delight himſelf in the Almighty? Will he *always* call upon God?" This queſtion plainly ſuppoſes, that hypocrites are not diſpoſed to call upon God ſteadily and uniformly, but are moved to do it, by fear, or ſome other conſtraining motive.

5. Hypocrites are apt to have an high opinion of their own goodneſs, and to be full of ſelf confidence. The language of their hearts and lips is, "Stand by thyſelf, come not near me; for I am holier than thou." And our Savior ſpake a parable to certain, "that truſted in themſelves that they were righteous, and deſpiſed others." The hypocritical ſcribes and phariſees looked down upon all others, with the greateſt contempt, and thanked God, that they were not as other men. But the ſincere chriſtian has a low and abaſing view of himſelf, and is ready to think others better

than

than himself. The psalmist said, "I am more brutish than any man." And Paul said, "I am less than the least of all saints." Hence it is a mark of hypocrisy, for men to have a high opinion of their own attainments in grace, and to look upon themselves better than common christians. I may add,

6. Hypocrites often fall away. This was often the case with the false hearted Israelites. They were almost constantly declining in their religion. God says, "They were bent to backsliding." Though they made high professions of love and obedience, yet their love soon waxed cold. Though they sang God's praise with raptures, when they experienced his mercy, yet they soon forgat his works. And we find by observation, that some, who make the highest pretences to religion, and express the highest joy, and warmest zeal, soon lose their raised affections, become cold and indifferent in religion, and at length fall into open vice and total apostasy. To this Job seems to have an eye, when he says of the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?" This not only expresses the inconstancy of the hypocrite; but seems to intimate his proneness to backslide from God, and forsake his ways. These are some of the marks of hypocrisy, some of the particular and prominent features of the hypocrite. And they ought to be attended to by all; especially by those, who profess to be the

true disciples of Christ. Many have been deceived, and probably many more will be in time to come. When our Lord mentioned the hypocrisy of one of his disciples, every one of the rest cried out with solicitude for himself, "Lord, is it I?" If our heart condemn us; God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. But if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

The Hypocrite.

JOB, xxxvi. 13.

But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath.

THE nature of hypocriſy, or the character of an hypocrite, I endeavored to deſcribe in my laſt diſcourſe. In which it was made to appear, that hypocriſy is a profeſſion of, or pretence to religion, when the heart is not in it. It is aſſuming the chriſtian name and character, and attending to and performing the external duties of religion, from ſelfiſh views and motives, either to gain the eſteem of men, or the approbation of God, without any regard to his honor and glory. A man is a hypocrite in religion, if, in his religious profeſſions and practices, he is aiming only at his own intereſt. Yet this is the very end which hypocrites have in view. For this cauſe they put on the outward garb of religion. But how far will they fall ſhort of their end? How different will be the event and iſſue of their religion from what they expect?

Inſtead of laying up for themſelves treaſures in heaven, as they expect, our text tells us, "they heap up wrath." An hypocritical profeſſion of religion may anſwer their purpoſe in this world; it may gain them a chriſtian name; it may procure them the applauſe of men; but it will not avail them after death: "For what is the hope of the hypocrite when God taketh away his ſoul?" This will more clearly appear from attending to the ſecond propoſition, which is,

II. To ſhow the evil of hypocriſy, or the awful end and aggravated condemnation of hypocrites—"they heap up wrath."

The evil of hypocriſy may appear from the view which men naturally have of an hypocrite; from conſidering how odious and deſpicable the character is in the view of every one, in the things of this life. Every one deſpiſes in his heart the man, who acts the hypocrite towards his neighbor; who ſpeaks fair to his face, but reproaches him behind his back; who profeſſes great friendſhip and eſteem for him, when, at the ſame time, he is an enemy to him in his heart. The man, who profeſſes great love to his neighbor, a readineſs to ſerve him, and to do him all the good in his power; and yet, at the ſame time, is only ſeeking to ſerve himſelf, to promote his own private advantage, ſuch an one, I ſay, is deſpiſed by every one. And is hypocriſy and deceit leſs odious, when exerciſed towards God, than when it is exerciſed towards man? Is it a leſs

crime

crime to pretend friendſhip to God, when the heart is not in the profeſſion, than it is to make the ſame falſe pretence to man? No, this cannot be imagin- ed. Hence God every where expreſſes his diſpleaſ- ure againſt hypocrites. And Chriſt often denounc- ed his woes againſt ſuch; he calls them "whited ſepulchres," and ſays to them, "ye ſerpents, ye gen- eration of vipers; how can ye eſcape the damna- tion of hell?" It is certain that hypocrites cannot deceive God, by all their ſolemn profeſſions of re- ligion; for he knows their thoughts, ſearches their hearts, and tries their reins. And as he cannot be deceived, ſo he will not be mocked. He requires truth in the inward part; he has pleaſure in up- rightneſs; he hateth lying and deceit; he has no delight in mere external ſervices. Accordingly, he declares, that in the judgment of the great day, when many ſhall plead what ſervices they had done for him; how they had eaten and drank in his preſ- ence, caſt out devils in his name, and in his name had done many wonderful works; he will then profeſs unto them, I never knew you; and will ſay, Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. It is a- bundantly evident from the whole tenor of ſacred ſcripture, that none but the real friends of God, none but thoſe whoſe hearts have been renewed by the power and grace of God, will be finally ad- mitted to the enjoyment of him.

But hypocrites ſhall not only loſe their labor in religion, or miſs of heaven, which they ſeek after;

but as they now heap up wrath, ſo they ſhall hereafter meet a moſt awful and aggravated condemnation. There is ſomething peculiarly criminal in known and allowed hypocriſy; it is ſolemn falſehood; it is devout deceit; it is injuring under the pretence of friendſhip. Secret enemies are the worſt kind of enemies; by them Chriſt is wounded in the houſe of his friends. Like Judas, they ſay, Hail, Maſter, and kiſs him, that they may betray him. Hypocrites, eſpecially thoſe who deceive themſelves, are the leaſt likely to obtain ſalvation; for they feel ſecure from conviction, they think themſelves ſafe from the wrath to come, and are not alarmed at all the threatenings of God's word againſt ſinners. They think themſelves rich and increaſed in goods, and have need of nothing. The means of grace, therefore, only ſerve to harden their hearts, and blind their minds, and ſtupify their conſciences, and make them ripe for ruin.

But furthermore; hypocrites heap up wrath to themſelves, as their own conſciences will forever condemn them in the world to come, for profeſſing what they never felt, and what they never practiſed; for ſatisfying themſelves with only a name to live, while they were dead; for acting a deceitful part, and deceiving themſelves as well as others, with an empty ſhow. Their own hearts will condemn them, for abuſing the means of grace, and uſing them only to ripen themſelves for deſtruction. They will feel the folly of toiling in external du-

ties,

ties, in which their hearts were never engaged. Hypocrites, therefore, are ſpoken of as ſome of the vileſt and moſt wretched of ſinners; for it is repreſented as an aggravation of the puniſhment of the finally impenitent, that they ſhall be doomed to have their portion with *hypocrites* and unbelievers. We now paſs to improve the ſubject.

1. If the character of the hypocrite has been juſtly deſcribed in theſe diſcourſes—if it conſiſts in profeſſing religion, when the heart does not feel it; in profeſſing friendſhip to God, when the heart is at enmity with him; or in acting from love to ſelf, inſtead of aiming at the glory of God; then we learn, that true religion does not at all conſiſt in outward profeſſions or practices, but in the inward exerciſes of the heart, in the temper and diſpoſition of the mind. It is true, external profeſſions and outward duties are required, and the good man will as naturally perform them, as the good tree will produce good fruit; but yet, in themſelves conſidered, or ſeparate from an upright heart, they are nothing. But you may aſk, Does not God require us to perform external duties, to read, pray, attend public worſhip, and the like? I ſay, Yes, I ſaid it before; but does God require men to be hypocrites? Does he require them to profeſs what is not true? Does he require them to profeſs themſelves to be his friends, when they are his enemies? Does he require them to pray, or to do any other external action, with a wicked heart?

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No; David says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." And Solomon says, "The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord." A man may live all his life time in the profession of religion, and in the performance of external services, and yet do no part of his duty, but remain an hypocrite, and only heap up wrath to himself against the day of wrath. Hence it clearly appears, that true religion consists in the pure and upright intentions of the heart, and not in mere external services.

2. We infer that many persons are deceived, not only with respect to their real character, but deceived with respect to their religious services. Multitudes dare not make a public profession of religion, lest they should be hypocrites; but yet they perform many external acts of duty, and think there is something really good and acceptable to God in what they do. But they deceive themselves; for there is some kind of profession in these external religious duties, and if their hearts be not right with God, in the performance of them, they are only hypocritical services. And what of duty is there in hypocrisy? Can God be pleased with such services? No; if we do not act from love to God, if we do not aim at his glory and honor in our religious duties, we act the part of real hypocrites.

3. From the subject we infer, that it is the heart which determines every one's character, or that every one is in reality as his heart is. If in his heart

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he loves God, if he is cordially reconciled to his law and government, if he is actuated by a regard to his honor and glory, then he is a chriſtian. But if his heart be unrenewed, if it be under the power and dominion of ſin ; if he be actuated only by a regard to himſelf ; then, notwithſtanding all his reformations of life, notwithſtanding all his religious profeſſions and pretences, and notwithſtanding all his outward acts of duty, he muſt be conſidered as an enemy to God. So ſays Solomon, " As a man thinketh in his heart, ſo is he ;" as the temper and diſpoſition of his heart is, ſuch is he in reality. A man may be very diligent and careful in the performance of outward duties, and be thought by the world in general to be a very good man, and yet be only an hypocrite ; for hypocriſy lies in the heart, and therefore out of the view of the world. We can judge only from what is outward, from what appears to us, and therefore if a man appear to us to act well, if his outward conduct and behavior be good, we may and ought to hope that he is a good man ; but God looketh at the heart, and will judge according to that ; for that determines his real character.

4. We learn of what importance it is, that every one look to his heart. It is for want of looking to our own hearts, for want of knowing our own hearts, that we are ſo ignorant of ourſelves. Moſt men are ſtrangers to their own hearts. Few look to their hearts at all ; they pay ſome attention to their outward conduct, and from this determine

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their character. Sinners look to their outward conduct, and moſt of them think that they are not very bad. They do not commit many ſins; they do not ſteal, nor lie, nor get drunk, nor ſwear, nor cheat, nor commit adultery, nor fornication; they mean to be honeſt and upright in their dealings, and injure no man's perſon or property; and therefore they think that they are very good kind of folks: And, indeed, for this world they are good ſort of folks; it is well for the world, it is for the benefit of ſociety, that they are ſuch. But what is this in the view of God, who ſearches the heart? Is not all this conſiſtent with a heart at enmity againſt God? a heart under the power and dominion of ſin? Do not ſuch live every day, every hour and moment, deſtitute of that love to God and love to man, which is the fulfilling of the law, and the whole of duty? Sin does not conſiſt ſo much in thoſe outward acts of wickedneſs, from which they refrain, as it does in a corrupt and wicked heart. This they have every moment; and yet being inſenſible of it, they can live in peace and quietneſs in ſin. I have often been ſurpriſed to find ſick and dying perſons, when complaining of their wickedneſs, mentioning that they had done this or that act of wickedneſs, and that they had omitted this or the other outward act of duty; as though all their ſin and wickedneſs conſiſted in theſe things, while they ſay nothing about the wickedneſs of their heart, in which all criminality conſiſts.

fists. For the same reason, or for want of attending to and knowing the wickedness of their own hearts, it is, that the very worst of men do not think themselves very bad. It is true, they have sometimes got drunk, or they have sometimes stolen, defrauded, committed adultery, and the like; but they are free from other crimes which other men commit; and it is but a few times that they have done these things, and therefore they cannot think themselves very criminal. So, because they have not done every wicked action that ever was done, they are not very wicked; though they have in many instances acted out the wickedness of their hearts, and at all times possessed a heart fully set in them to do evil, and as corrupt and vile as can be conceived of. From the same cause, that is, from ignorance of their own hearts, others, who have kept themselves from gross acts of wickedness, who have performed many outward acts of duty, who have lived in the practice of attending public worship, and family and secret prayer, are ready to imagine, that they are really very good christians; when, at the same time, they are only hypocrites, and under the power and dominion of sin. How important is it, then, that we should attend to our own heart, and examine it very critically and impartially; especially since the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Men are universally fond of thinking well of themselves; and because we wish to have a good opinion of ourselves, we easily

eaſily entertain it. But how dreadful will it be to remain blind to our own character, until death undeceive us, and we open our eyes in a world of miſery, where there will be no remedy! Let us, then, feel the importance of having a right heart, of acting from a real regard to God, and of aiming ſincerely at his glory in all our conduct. Since this is the only right motive, ſince if we are deſtitute of this we are, at beſt, no better than hypocrites, let us ſee to it, that our hearts be right with God.

5. From this ſubject we infer, that true religion is infinitely important to all mankind. Nor is this inference unnatural; for even the hypocriſy of men proves it to be true. If religion were of no importance, their would be no hypocrites. It is only that which is good that is counterfeited. Men feel the importance of religion; at leaſt, that it is of ſome importance, otherwiſe no one would make pretenſions to it. But we find mankind all over the world making pretenſions to ſome kind of religion, and this ſhows that there is a general belief among all nations, that religion is really important. All falſe religion, and all falſe pretenſions to religion, afford a clear and ſtrong proof of the importance of true religion. If any religion be important, it muſt be that which is true, or that which conſiſts in love to God, in friendſhip to him, in a heart devoted to his ſervice, and not in any thing ſelfiſh; for ſelfiſhneſs is the ſum and ſubſtance of all ſin, and the ſource of all the hypocriſy in the world.

6. What

6. What little reaſon have ſinners to quiet themſelves with the thought, that they are no hypocrites ? With this many ſeem to quiet themſelves. How often may we hear one and another ſay, that they are no hypocrites ? Has not this thought occurred to ſome of you today, while we have been treating on this ſubject ? Has not one and another ſaid, " Well, I am not an hypocrite ?" What are you then ? Are you a real chriſtian ? Are you the hearty friend of God ? If this be your character, you are no hypocrite. But when you ſay, that you are no hypocrite, do you mean to ſay, that you make no pretenſions to any religion, that you do not pretend to have any love to God, or any regard to his law ? Do you mean to declare yourſelf to be an open, avowed enemy to God ? Are you willing to own this character ? This muſt be your character, if you are neither a chriſtian, nor an hypocrite. But is this an amiable character ? Will this procure the love and eſteem of any of your fellow men ? However, if this be the character which you are willing to own, let me entreat you to conſider, a moment, what it is to be of ſuch a character. It is to be an enemy to God, the greateſt and beſt of beings, who is your Creator, Preſerver, and Benefactor, who has given his Son to ſuffer and die for your eternal good, who has invited you to accept ſalvation, who has waited upon you to be gracious to you, who now invites you to return to him and live, and who has power and authority to

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ſend you, in a moment, to eternal perdition! As an ambaſſador of Chriſt, I pray you in his ſtead to become reconciled to God. Knowing the terror of the Lord, I would perſuade you to flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life: Remember that you are, this moment, in the hands of that God, who is angry with the wicked every day, who has bent his bow and made it ready, and prepared his inſtruments of death. And remember, that God has ſaid, his ſpirit ſhall not always ſtrive with ſinners. Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of ſalvation. Wherefore, today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; but if you refuſe and rebel, know that their remaineth no more ſacrifice for ſins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which ſhall devour the adverſaries.

SERMON

SERMON XVII.

The unchanging Goodneſs and Mercy of God an everlaſting Source of Gratitude and Praiſe.

[*A Thankſgiving Sermon.*]

PSALM cxxxvi. 1.

O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever.

PRAISING God is not the duty of a thankſgiving day only, but of every other day. This is the duty of all rational creatures; and will remain to be their duty, as long as God continues unchangeably good and merciful. And ſince his goodneſs and mercy will endure forever, it will forever be the duty of reaſonable creatures, to pay him this reaſonable ſervice. Gratitude and praiſe, or praiſe flowing from a grateful heart, will be the employment of ſaints and angels, in the ceaſeleſs ages of eternity. The exhortations to gratitude

and praiſe in the word of God are almoſt innumerable; and the examples of good men, in this reſpect, are very frequent. We often find thoſe who poſſeſſed a grateful heart, celebrating the praiſes of Jehovah, and giving thanks to God, for innumerable mercies and favors received. The book of Pſalms, in particular, is almoſt entirely made up of ſongs of praiſe. And we often find the pious pſalmiſt ſo deeply impreſſed with a lively ſenſe of the infinite goodneſs of God, and his worthineſs to be praiſed, that he calls upon all mankind, yea, upon all creation, to praiſe the Lord. Though the pious ſoul often ſenſibly feels its perſonal obligation to gratitude for perſonal favors, and is diſpoſed to recite particular inſtances of divine goodneſs to itſelf; yet all its gratitude and praiſe does not flow from a ſenſe of perſonal good enjoyed. It is led, by the ſtreams of divine goodneſs, which flow to itſelf, up to the Source and Fountain of all the good which flows to the univerſe, and of which all creatures partake; and therefore feels its obligation, and the obligation of all creatures, to praiſe the Lord, becauſe "he is good, and his mercy endureth forever." The truly pious and grateful heart is not ſelfiſh in its gratitude, is not thankful merely for thoſe favors which itſelf enjoys; but feels grateful for all that goodneſs which fills heaven and earth.

This was evidently the ſpirit and temper of the pious pſalmiſt, when he compoſed this pſalm, which has

has this peculiarity in it, that every verſe in the pſalm ends with theſe words, "for his mercy endureth forever;" which are emphatically repeated twenty ſix times. In enumerating the acts of divine goodneſs and mercy, the pſalmiſt takes notice, not only of particular inſtances of God's goodneſs to the church, but of his wrath to their enemies; becauſe thoſe inſtances of his wrath were real inſtances of his mercy to his people. Hence he mentions it as an inſtance of God's goodneſs, that he not only made his people paſs ſafely through the Red Sea, but alſo that he overthrew Pharaoh and his hoſt. And for the ſame reaſon, ſaints and angels are repreſented, in the Revelation of St. John, as rejoicing and praiſing God, for the judgments executed upon ſpiritual Babylon. "And after theſe things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, ſaying, Alleluia: Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornications, and hath avenged the blood of his ſervants at her hand. And again they ſaid, Alleluia. And her ſmoke roſe up forever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beaſts fell down and worſhipped God that ſat on the throne, ſaying, Amen; Alleluia." Thus heaven and earth join to give thanks to God, for his righteous judgments upon his and his church's enemies, becauſe theſe judgments flow from his eſ-

ſential goodneſs, and are as expreſſive of his mercy, as the beſtowment of good. He is the ſame kind and benevolent Being, when he inflicts wrath upon his enemies, that he is when he confers favors upon his friends ; " for his mercy endureth forever." Hence this obſervation naturally comes into view, from the words of our text, namely,

That the everlaſting and unchanging goodneſs and mercy of God, are an everlaſting ſource of gratitude and praiſe.

This is indeed the ſpirit of the text. The pſalmiſt here calls upon all to give thanks unto the Lord, for this reaſon, that his goodneſs, and that his mercy, endureth forever. And this is the great reaſon, why we ſhould give thanks to God, not merely becauſe we receive particular and perſonal favors from him, but becauſe he is unchangeably good and merciful. I would not, however, be underſtood to ſay, that we are not obliged to give thanks to God for particular and perſonal favors, for it is certain that we are ; and the real chriſtian will feel his heart moſt ſenſibly and gratefully affected, with the innumerable mercies which God confers upon him. The divine goodneſs will appear *great indeed*, in conferring ſo many and ſuch undeſerved favors upon one ſo greatly unworthy. Hence he will feelingly adopt the words of David, " Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my houſe, that thou haſt brought me hitherto ?" But it is evident, that it is not *merely*, or *eſpecially*, the perſonal favors received,

received, that are the cauſe of gratitude; but theſe favors conferred on one ſo unworthy give him a more lively and animating ſenſe of the infinite goodneſs of that Being, from whom ſuch favors flow.

But that the goodneſs and mercy of God are an everlaſting ſource of gratitude and praiſe, will appear, with additional evidence, from conſidering,

1. That the goodneſs and mercy of God are infinite in their nature and degree.

God is not only good and merciful, but his goodneſs and mercy are perfect. In all creatures goodneſs is limited and finite. Angels are good; they are poſſeſſed of real benevolence and love; they always feel benevolent; they always rejoice in benevolence, they are always diſpoſed to expreſs benevolence, and to promote the happineſs of all God's creatures; but ſtill their goodneſs is nothing in compariſon with the goodneſs of God. There is a degree of goodneſs in ſaints, though it is mixed with great imperfection. But in God there is all that goodneſs, which can make the infinite Jehovah abſolutely perfect. No creature can wiſh him to poſſeſs more goodneſs than he does poſſeſs. Any kind or degree of alteration in his nature, would render him imperfect, and make him leſs good. If then goodneſs be deſirable, if it be matter of gratitude and praiſe, what gratitude! what praiſe! is due to him who poſſeſſes all poſſible goodneſs! If the few drops of goodneſs, which fall on us, ſhould awaken gratitude in our hearts, then what praiſe is due to Him,

who is the boundleſs ocean of good, from whence theſe drops flow! This leads me to obſerve,

2. That the goodneſs and mercy of God are the fountain and ſource of all the good and happineſs enjoyed in the univerſe.

From this infinite and inexhauſtible fountain flows all the happineſs which angels and glorified ſpirits enjoy in heaven; from hence flows all the happineſs that the many millions and millions of mankind in every part of the world, enjoy; and from hence flows all the natural and animal good, which all the animal creation enjoy. In a word, from this fountain flows all the good, all the happineſs, which fills the univerſe ſo full, that there can be no more conſiſtently with the moſt benevolent purpoſe of the Deity. Surely, then, here is a juſt foundation for everlaſting gratitude and praiſe. If the ſtreams of divine goodneſs, which flow to us, ought to excite our gratitude and praiſe, what gratitude, what praiſe ſhall we render to that God who fills the univerſe with good! God's goodneſs to other men and to other beings deſerves our gratitude and praiſe, as truly as his goodneſs to us; and we ought to rejoice as really in the happineſs of others as in our own; and if we poſſeſs a truly benevolent ſpirit and temper we ſhall do it. We find the angels rejoicing in all the good and happineſs, which is communicated to mankind. Hence their joy, when God laid the foundations of the world; hence their ſong of praiſe, when the Savior

was

was born; and hence their joy at the converſion of ſinners. The goodneſs of God is the proper ground and foundation of gratitude and praiſe; and every inſtance in which God manifeſts his goodneſs, awakens a ſenſe of gratitude afreſh in the minds of holy beings. Indeed, notwithſtanding all the good and happineſs which creatures enjoy, there would be no obligation to gratitude and praiſe, if their good and happineſs did not flow from a benevolent Being. It is not, therefore, the good, the happineſs enjoyed, that is the proper foundation for praiſe; but the benevolent ſource, from which this good and happineſs proceeds. Suppoſe that mankind enjoyed all the outward good and happineſs which they now poſſeſs, yet if this were the effect of chance or accident, there would then be no foundation for gratitude or praiſe. Or ſuppoſe it were all the fruit and effect of their own independent wiſdom, prudence, and induſtry, there would then be no room for gratitude or praiſe. Or if we could ſuppoſe that all our enjoyments proceeded from a Being deſtitute of benevolence and love, who had no friendly and good deſign in giving them, then we ſhould be under no obligation of gratitude for what we enjoy. It is, therefore, the benevolence of the giver that lays us under obligation for the gift; and our obligation to him is great, not always in proportion to the value of the gift, but in proportion to the benevolence of the giver in the beſtowment of it. Hence it appears, that the good-

neſs of God is the foundation of real gratitude and praiſe. And that this ſource of gratitude is everlaſting further appears, from conſidering,

3. That the goodneſs and mercy of God are everlaſting and unchangeable—"his mercy endureth forever."

God was the ſame good and merciful Being before angels, or men, or any creature exiſted, that he has been ſince. It was his antecedent goodneſs and mercy, which led him to create the world and all beings and things. It was this goodneſs and mercy, which led him to adopt that plan of operation, in which goodneſs and mercy might be manifeſted and diſplayed in the moſt glorious manner. And the ſame goodneſs and mercy which firſt moved him to create, has governed him, in every part of his conduct, ever ſince. He is unchangeable in his nature, and therefore his goodneſs and mercy endure forever. From the beginning of the world to this day, all mankind have experienced the goodneſs and mercy of God, and from this day forward, as long as the ſun and moon endure, they ſhall continue to experience his goodneſs and mercy. The goodneſs and mercy of God do not fluctuate and change, as the benevolence of men often does, but they remain the ſame, though the diſpenſations of providence are frequently changing. God is as truly good when he frowns, as when he ſmiles; when he corrects and chaſtiſes his friends for their faults, as when he rewards

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them for their virtues. When we take a view of the moral world, we find that even the church of God in former ages, though the particular object of divine love, was under a dark diſpenſation, in compariſon with the preſent ; but God was no leſs kind and good in thoſe dark ages, than he is now. And his goodneſs now, is no leſs than it will be, when all the ſaints are made perfectly bleſſed in heaven. For the Lord is always good, and his mercy endureth forever. Could there be a time when God ſhould ceaſe to be good, we ſhould then be under no obligation of gratitude and praiſe, even though the effects of his goodneſs ſhould ſtill remain. But ſince his goodneſs and mercy ſhall endure forever, they muſt neceſſarily be an everlaſting ſource of gratitude and praiſe. I may add,

4. All this goodneſs and mercy of God is under the direction of perfect, unerring wiſdom.

Goodneſs in God is not the impulſe of blind paſſion, or inclination, as it is in men. It does not conſiſt in the beſtowment of a favor, as the humor of the preſent moment prompts ; but it conſiſts in beſtowing ſuch a favor, at ſuch a time, and to ſuch an object, as infinite wiſdom dictates. For want of this wiſdom, men often confer favors on improper objects, and in an unſuitable proportion, and therefore many times find, after they have conferred favors, that they have done wrong in the beſtowment of them ; that their favors are loſt, or worſe than loſt. But this can never be

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the caſe with God; for his wiſdom is ſufficient, at all times, and under all circumſtances, to direct the infinite benevolence of his nature. Hence, he knows perfectly well when to beſtow ten talents, when to beſtow five, and when but one. In the different diſtributions of his favors, he is no reſpecter of perſons; he is not partial to one more than to another; but he acts from infinite wiſdom in all his dealings towards his creatures. It is not any partiality to *this* man rather than to *that*, which is the cauſe of his giving to *this* rather than to *that*. Infinite wiſdom enables him to ſee that the greateſt good will be promoted by the beſtowment of different favors, at different times, upon different perſons. Hence it is not only conſiſtent with infinite wiſdom, that God ſhould ſometimes viſit mankind with judgments, but infinite wiſdom requires it. And divine judgments make an important part in God's plan of general good. Hence it is, that ſaints and angels rejoice in God's righteous judgments, as well as in his moſt beneficent acts of kindneſs. And thoſe very ſpirits who at one time ſing, "Glory to God in the higheſt, becauſe on earth there is peace and good will to men," do on another occaſion ſing, "Alleluia, ſalvation, and glory, and honor, unto our God; for true and righteous are his judgments." It is, therefore, abundantly evident, that the unchanging goodneſs and mercy of God are an everlaſting ſource and foundation of gratitude and praiſe.

IMPROVEMENT.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If the infinite and immutable goodneſs and mercy of God be an everlaſting ſource of gratitude and praiſe; if this be the primary ground of our obligation to praiſe God, antecedent to the conſideration of favors received; and if particular and perſonal benefits are a ſecondary ground of gratitude, in proportion to the worth of the gifts and the benevolence of the giver; then how infinitely great are our obligations to give thanks unto the Lord, and to praiſe the name of the moſt high God! If we are under obligation to be thankful to God, and to praiſe him, for the infinite benevolence of his nature, and if this be the primary ground of gratitude, as I think has been abundantly proved, then what an endleſs and boundleſs ſource of gratitude and praiſe is here opened to our view! Well may we join with the pſalmiſt and ſay, "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can ſhew forth all his praiſe?" It is as much impoſſible for us to render praiſe to God equal to his infinite worthineſs, as it is to comprehend his infinite majeſty. The higheſt ſeraph, who ſtands before the throne, ſenſible of his utter inability to ſhew forth all God's praiſe, bows before the throne, and caſts his crown at the foot of the Lamb. Such views of the infinite goodneſs of God as he has, fills his ſoul with gratitude, and his mouth with continual ſongs of praiſe; and it is the great happineſs of all the hoſts of heaven to be

continually

continually praiſing God. And though by reaſon of our preſent imperfection, we cannot equal the angels in their ſongs of praiſe ; yet we can give God ſome real praiſe, if our hearts are deeply impreſſed with a ſenſe of his goodneſs. And every heart that has once been led to a view of the infinite goodneſs of God, will feel its obligation forever to praiſe and adore him. And when the pious perſon further conſiders the innumerable expreſſions of divine goodneſs to himſelf, the many, great, and diſtinguiſhing favors, which have flowed from this fountain of love, to one ſo infinitely unworthy, his gratitude riſes ſtill higher, and he ſays, " What ſhall I render to the Lord, for all his benefits ? Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and all that is within me bleſs his holy name. Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and forget not all his benefits." Impreſſed with ſuch a ſenſe of the infinite goodneſs of God, he will long to have all creatures join with him in praiſing God. He will not only ſay, " O ! that *men* would praiſe the Lord for his goodneſs and for his wonderful works to the children of men ;" but will alſo wiſh that every thing that hath breath would praiſe the Lord.

2. The ſubject leads us further to infer, that every reaſonable creature, whatever his circumſtances and condition may be, is under obligation to praiſe God, and will forever remain ſo.

Wicked men may ſometimes feel their obligation to be thankful, when they receive ſome ſignal

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and remarkable favor from God ; but they cannot feel their obligation to be thankful, when they are in trouble and affliction. They then murmur and complain, inſtead of giving thanks. They look round on others, who are in outward proſperity, and complain that they are not equally proſperous. They think that thoſe ought to be thankful, but not they themſelves. But if the unchanging goodneſs of God be the higheſt foundation of gratitude and praiſe, then certainly they are ſtill under obligation to praiſe God, notwithſtanding all the adverſity which they meet with. They ought even now to rejoice, that the goodneſs and mercy of God endureth forever ; and that his wiſdom directs him how to exerciſe his goodneſs, and how to confer his favors in the beſt poſſible manner. They ought to praiſe him for all marks of divine favor, for all good conferred on all his creatures, and for that good which they themſelves enjoy, even in the midſt of all their trials, which may alſo be turned into future and eternal good. They ought to be thankful for thoſe trials, which are deſigned to ripen and prepare them for endleſs felicity. It may be, indeed, a hard matter to bring a man, overwhelmed in adverſity, to feel his obligation to praiſe God ; but if he be a good man, if his heart be right with God, he will do it. Though he be ſtripped of all his worldly enjoyments, yet with Job he will ſay, " The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away : Bleſſed be the name of the Lord."

Thus,

Thus, as the apoſtle expreſſes it, he will "in every thing give thanks."

3. If the everlaſting and unchanging goodneſs and mercy of God be a conſtant and perpetual ſource of gratitude and praiſe, and if our obligation to thoſe religious exerciſes be heightened and increaſed, by the innumerable benefits conferred on ſuch unworthy and illdeſerving creatures as we are; then, how extremely criminal and vile are thoſe, who live continually unthankful, who never praiſe God for his goodneſs and mercy, which endureth forever, and which they live upon, and to which they are indebted for all their happineſs and hopes!

We all agree to condemn the man, as an unnatural wretch, who is unthankful to an earthly benefactor for his kindneſs; and more eſpecially if he injure and abuſe him, from whom he has received peculiar tokens of favor. But how many thouſands of mankind are there, who live continually unthankful to God, and never praiſe him, either for that goodneſs and mercy which endureth forever, or for thoſe inſtances of divine goodneſs, which they themſelves have experienced! If there be any ſuch here preſent, are they not unſpeakably vile and criminal? Do they not deſerve to have every favor taken from them? Do they not deſerve the wrath and diſpleaſure, inſtead of the kindneſs and favor of God? And now let me aſk; Is not this the character of ſome of you? Did you

ever

ever feel real gratitude to God, and truly praiſe him for his goodneſs? The unrenewed heart is ever an ungrateful heart. Gratitude and praiſe are the exerciſes of a gracious heart; and therefore a great part of mankind are ſtrangers to theſe exerciſes. And O! how criminal are ſuch!

The great buſineſs of today is, in a public manner, as well as private, to expreſs our gratitude and praiſe to God, for his goodneſs and mercy, as the ſource from whence every favor flows to all his creatures; to praiſe him for his renewed goodneſs to us, to the people of this land in particular, in the courſe of the preſent year. But how can thoſe expreſs gratitude and praiſe, whoſe hearts never felt any gratitude? How can thoſe offer praiſe to God, who are deſtitute of a thankful heart? You, therefore, who have a ſenſe of divine goodneſs, muſt perform the delightful duty of this day. Bleſs the Lord, O houſe of Iſrael. Bleſs the Lord, O houſe of Aaron: Praiſe ye the Lord.

——AMEN. ALLELUIA.

SERMON

SERMON XVIII.

The Gospel Method of instituting and ordering Churches.

TITUS, i. 5.

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.

AT the first establishment of christianity in the world, and the institution of christian churches, much was necessary to be done by the apostles, which was peculiar to that particular period. The christian church was established upon a plan, in many respects, different from that of the Jewish church. And when christian churches were set up, where paganism had prevailed, there was much to be done to set every thing in proper order. This made it necessary for the apostles, who had been particularly instructed by Christ in the things pertaining to his kingdom, and who were also under the special influence and direction of the Holy Spirit, not only to give particular directions to those

thoſe miniſters of the churches, who had not been perſonally acquainted with Chriſt, nor divinely inſpired; but alſo to write thoſe epiſtles to them, and to the churches, with which we are favored in theſe latter days. Beſides, this new ſtate of the churches made it neceſſary for theſe great apoſtles to reviſit the churches which they had planted, to know their ſtate, and to ſet in order the things that might ſtill be wanting to render them completely beautiful and regular. Hence St. Paul, after having given many directions, ſays, "The reſt will I ſet in order when I come." He was now about to depart from Crete, a large iſland, where he had eſtabliſhed a number of chriſtian churches; and accordingly determined to leave Titus, whom he had not only been the inſtrument of converting, but whom he had conſecrated to the work of the miniſtry, to pay further attention to the ſtate and circumſtances of thoſe new formed ſocieties. This he tells him and us in the words of my text: "For this cauſe left I thee in Crete, that thou ſhouldeſt ſet in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." The laſt clauſe, "as I had appointed thee," makes it evident, that Paul had, previouſly to his leaving him at Crete, given him many particular directions and inſtructions as to his work. But of ſo much conſequence and importance was his work, that he thought it adviſable, at leaſt, to give him thoſe further or

repeated inſtructions, which are contained in this epiſtle.

Our attention is called up to the work which was aſſigned to Titus, and the inquiry is, What had he to do? What was the buſineſs which Paul left him to perform? The anſwer is contained in the text, and is divided into two general branches.

I. To ſet in order the things that were wanting: And,

II. To ordain elders in every city.

I. The firſt general branch of duty, which Paul mentions as incumbent on Titus, and which was one great end of his being left at Crete, was, to ſet in order the things that were wanting.

It may, perhaps, be as well here as any where, to obſerve, that Crete was not the name of any particular city or town, but of a large iſland in the Mediterranean ſea, now called Candia, and which, it is ſaid, was once called Hecatompolis, from the one hundred cities that were in it. (See Henry.) It is beyond a doubt, therefore, that when Paul ſays, "and ordain elders in every city," he means every city on this iſland; at leaſt, in ſo many of them as had received the goſpel, and in which particular churches had been eſtabliſhed. Hence it appears probable, if not certain, that there were many churches under the inſpection of Titus, becauſe deſtitute of particular elders or miniſters to take the overſight of them. This being ſuppoſed, and it being well known, that theſe church-

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es were but newly eſtabliſhed, and that Chriſtianity itſelf, eſpecially as to its external order and inſtitutions, was a new thing in the world, it cannot be doubted, but that there were many things wanting, which needed to be ſet in order. Though there might be real religion, where many things were wanting; and though there might be true chriſtian churches, where ſome things were out of order, in this their infant ſtate; yet it was not only deſirable that what was wanting ſhould be ſupplied, and that what was out of order ſhould be put in order; I ſay it was not only deſirable, but the will of God, that theſe things ſhould be done: For God is not the author of confuſion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the ſaints; and therefore requires that all things be done decently and in order. Order and regularity are diſcoverable in all the works of God. The chriſtian church, which is ſpoken of as Chriſt's body, is a beautiful, regular, harmonious body; and particular care has been taken, by the Head of this body, that there ſhould be no ſchiſm, no diſorder in any of the members. Hence every inſtitution and appointment, relative to the church at large, and to every particular branch of it, is wiſely adapted to promote the order, harmony, and regularity of the whole. The church of Chriſt, in the collective ſenſe, is one body; yet as there are different branches of it, conſiſting of ſaints in different places, united together for the mutual edifi-

cation of each other, theſe are ſpoken of as ſo many ſeparate and diſtinct churches. Hence the expreſſion juſt now mentioned, "God is not the author of confuſion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the ſaints:" Hence all theſe ſeparate churches of the ſaints, are diſtinctly organized, by the great head of the church, with an head or ruler under Chriſt, and have their laws and rules preſcribed by Chriſt; their modes of adminiſtration of the word, the ordinances, and the goſpel diſcipline or government within themſelves, as fully and entirely, as though they comprehended the whole church of God. Theſe things being carefully obſerved, may help us to underſtand what Titus had to do, to ſet in order the things that were wanting in every city. He was to ſee that all the diſtinct churches were duly organized; that they underſtood their duty as churches of Chriſt; that they conducted all their eccleſiaſtical affairs, in a decent regular manner, as became chriſtian brethren, whom God had joined together for their mutual edification and comfort, and for the greater advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. We may now attend to the ſecond branch of duty, which Titus was to perform, and that was,

II. To ordain elders in every city; or in other words, to ſee that each church in each city was provided for and ſupplied with a faithful paſtor, teacher, ruler and guide; for all theſe epithets belong to ſuch perſons as the apoſtle calls elders, and

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whom Titus was to ordain in every city. It is quite foreign from my preſent deſign to enter into a critical diſtinction between biſhops, elders, paſtors, teachers, &c. and, to ſhow what was the difference, if there were any, in the dignity, power, or duty annexed to each. It is ſufficient to obſerve, that the apoſtle, in his writings, uſes theſe appellations promiſcuouſly, to denote perſons of the ſame office. One important branch of duty, which Titus had to perform, was, to ordain miniſters in all the cities, or to ſee that each church was furniſhed with a faithful paſtor; for a "church, without a fixed ſtanding miniſtry in it, is imperfect, is wanting." A church, without a fixed miniſtry, is not properly and completely organized. And it is abundantly evident from the ſacred ſcriptures, that it is the will of God, that every chriſtian church and ſociety ſhould be furniſhed with a ſtated miniſter. This ſuppoſes and neceſſarily implies, that it is the duty of chriſtians to form themſelves into ſocieties; to unite together to obſerve divine inſtitutions; to maintain the worſhip and ordinances of God; to watch over one another in love; to counſel, warn, reprove, encourage, and aſſiſt each other in duty. In this way is the viſible church ſupported in the world: Or this is one ſpecial and important mean, in the hand of God, of keeping alive the real and true church, and of maintaining true religion. It is evident, that this was the way, in which the apoſtles practiſed; and ſurely no

chriſtian will object againſt their practice. When they went and preached the goſpel in any city or town, and found a number ready to embrace the goſpel and profeſs religion, they there inſtituted a church. And thoſe chriſtians entered into covenant with God and one another, to walk together in the faith and order of the goſpel. Such churches being inſtituted, as ſoon as there could be found able and faithful men, who poſſeſſed ſuch a character as Chriſt required his miniſters to poſſeſs, they were ſet over them in the Lord. And this was one important duty, which Titus had to perform at Crete—to ordain elders in every city—to ſee that each church was furniſhed with a faithful miniſter. This certainly is implied in his ordaining elders in every city, that is, that every city might be ſupplied with a ſtated paſtor.

Now, that it is the will of Chriſt, that all his churches ſhould be furniſhed with a fixed and ſtated miniſtry, appears from the practice of the apoſtles in ordaining miniſters in all the churches. That this was their practice is evident, not only from the text, but from Acts xiv. 23. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church," *i. e.* in every church in Lyſtra, in Iconium, and in Antioch, "and had prayed with faſting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed." And then they, *i. e.* Paul and Barnabas, departed. They had then ſet in order the things that were before wanting in thoſe churches, and accordingly

accordingly went on to Piſidia, and Pamphylia, and Perga, and Attalia, to ſet in order the things that were there wanting. It was the grand buſineſs of the apoſtles to plant the chriſtian religion—to eſtabliſh churches—to ordain elders in every church. And when they had done this, and completely organized the churches, and ſet every thing in order, they commended them to the grace of God, and left them. Thus it appears, that every chriſtian ſociety, every goſpel church, had its particular miniſter, whoſe office it was, to preſide in the church, to pray with the church, to preach to the church, to adminiſter the ordinances to the church, to rule and govern the church, according to the laws which Chriſt had enacted in his ſpiritual kingdom. Permit me further to obſerve, (becauſe I think the ſubject of ſome importance in the preſent ſituation of things, and that it is part of my duty to make the obſervation, in order to give a portion in due ſeaſon) permit me, I ſay, further to obſerve; that it is the will of Chriſt, that his churches ſhould be furniſhed, each and every one of them, with a fixed and ſtated miniſtry, appears from the names given to miniſters, or the titles by which they are diſtinguiſhed.

They are not only called teachers, becauſe it is one part of their duty to preach the word, but they are called paſtors or ſhepherds, becauſe it is their duty to take care of ſome particular part of the flock, or of ſome particular flock. And cer-

tainly the ſhepherd cannot take care of the flock, unleſs he be with them and among them. They are alſo called overſeers and watchmen, becauſe it is their duty to take particular notice of their chriſtian brethren, and ſee that they are faithful to their great Maſter. He who watches over others muſt be with them, that he may obſerve their conduct. They are, moreover, called rulers, becauſe, under Chriſt, they are to govern the church, or to lead in the diſcipline of it. And to do this, they muſt neceſſarily be with the church. Chriſt is, indeed, the only King, Lawgiver and Ruler in his church. He is fully able to rule and govern all his church, how widely ſoever it is extended, and notwithſtanding it is divided into many diſtinct ſocieties. He can be ſpiritually preſent with them in all places. But becauſe he cannot be perſonally preſent; when he left the world, and aſcended up to heaven, he gave gifts unto men; and among all his gifts this was one of the moſt eſſential—Miniſters to rule and govern, as well as to teach and inſtruct, in all his churches. The miniſters of Chriſt act under him in thoſe particular churches, over which the Holy Ghoſt hath made them overſeers. This ſuggeſts to us a further evidence, that it is the will of Chriſt, that there ſhould be ſtated and fixed miniſters in each and all the churches, viz.

The duties, which he has expreſsly enjoined upon miniſters to perform, clearly ſuppoſe and imply that they are fixed and eſtabliſhed in ſome particular

ular place, and have the immediate watch and care of ſome diſtinct ſociety, or body of chriſtians.

They are thus directed: "Feed the flock of God which is *among you*, taking the *overſight* thereof, not by conſtraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre ſake, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being enſamples to the flock." Every expreſſion here made uſe of ſuppoſes, that thoſe elders or miniſters were fixed and eſtabliſhed among a ſociety of profeſſed chriſtians. This is implied in their feeding the flock of God among them. This is implied in taking the overſight of the flock. They could not take the overſight of thoſe who were afar off. So when they are directed, not to be the lords over God's heritage, it ſuppoſes they have a power in and over the church, which they muſt exerciſe, not in a ſovereign and arbitrary manner, but with meekneſs, and according to the ſpirit of Chriſt. So again, when they are directed to be enſamples to the flock, it ſuppoſes that they dwell among the flock, and that their good example may have a good influence upon them. Theſe, and other duties, which are enjoined upon the miniſters of Chriſt, can never be performed, unleſs they are fixed and dwell ſtatedly among their flock. They can neither know the ſtate of their flock, nor give to every one a portion in due ſeaſon, unleſs they are ſtated paſtors.

The duties, which are enjoined upon people with reſpect to the miniſters of Chriſt, alſo clearly prove,

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that miniſters are conſidered as dwelling among them. "Know them that labor among you and are over you in the Lord, and admoniſh you; and eſteem them highly in love for their work ſake. Obey them which have the rule over you, and ſubmit yourſelves, for they watch for your ſouls as they that muſt give account. Is any ſick, let him call for the elders, and let them pray over him." All the duties here enjoined upon the people, plainly ſuppoſe, that there was in the days of the apoſtles, and ought to be now, a fixed miniſter in every particular church.

Now, it is abundantly evident, that our Lord Jeſus Chriſt has made ample proviſion for the edification, comfort, eſtabliſhment, peace, order, and government of all his churches, by a ſtated, fixed, and ſettled miniſtry in them. And every church of Chriſt, that obſerves his directions, ſhall be ſupplied. It is a peculiar favor to be thus ſupplied; and it is a ſore judgment of heaven upon any people to be left long deſtitute of the ſettled miniſtry. This is confirmed by melancholy experience. For it is commonly the caſe of a deſtitute people, that they are broken in pieces, and ſcattered as ſheep having no ſhepherd. Diſorder and confuſion naturally take place, and religion commonly decays among them.

And now, my brethren, let me aſk you, whether theſe things be not true, and agreeable to the law and

and the teſtimony? But if theſe things be true, then the following inferences muſt alſo be true.

1. That it is clearly unſcriptural and diſorderly to form a particular church or chriſtian ſociety, of perſons or members, who live ſcattered in divers towns and places, which are remote from each other.

It is abundantly evident, that the apoſtles practiſed differently. They went into cities, towns, and villages, and preached the goſpel; and when a number in one place embraced the chriſtian religion, and profeſſed their faith in Chriſt, they formed them into a church ſtate; and ſo they did in every place, where they found believers enough for a particular church. And when they had formed particular churches, they ſupplied them as ſoon as poſſible with ſtated miniſters, and put every thing in order according to the rules of Chriſt's family. Hence we read of the church at Jeruſalem—the church at Corinth—the church at Epheſus, &c. Theſe churches, compoſed of members, who could meet together in one place, walking in the faith and order of the goſpel, had peace, and were edified. There was no ſuch thing, in the days of the apoſtles, as a perſon's living among chriſtian brethren at Corinth, and yet joining himſelf with the church at Jeruſalem, or at any other place. This would have been diſorderly, becauſe it would have counteracted the end and deſign of the inſtitution of chriſtian churches in different places. It is evident, that when chriſtians, reſiding in different

towns

towns and remote places, form themſelves into one church, it is impoſſible for them regularly to ſupport and attend upon thepublic worſhip and ordinances of the goſpel, or to meet together, as they ought frequently to do, to encourage, comfort, ſtrengthen, and animate each other. And it is extremely difficult, if not impoſſible, for chriſtians, in ſuch a ſituation, to watch over each other, and maintain that diſcipline in the church, which is of great importance, and expreſsly enjoined. It appears to be kindly and wiſely ordered by Chriſt, that churches ſhould be compoſed of chriſtians near together, who have frequent opportunities to ſee and converſe with each other; and eſpecially to unite together every Lord's day, in the public and ſocial duties of the ſanctuary. From this it appears, that it is unſcriptural and diſorderly, to form a church of chriſtians reſiding in different places, and remote from each other; unleſs it be where the ſmallneſs of the number of profeſſing chriſtians will not otherwiſe admit of their enjoying goſpel ordinances.

Should it be here objected, that there are chriſtians of different denominations, who vary ſo much in their articles of faith and practice, that ſome cannot conſcientiouſly join with the church where they live, and therefore they may go and join themſelves with ſome church not far diſtant, with whom they can agree and hold fellowſhip and communion, without walking diſorderly. To this I reply, no

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ſuch thing was known in the apoſtles' days. Chriſtians were not then ſo divided in ſentiment, but that they could hold communion together, nor ought they to be now. No doubt but chriſtians differed, then, in ſome articles of faith and practice; but they did not differ ſo much but that they could unite, as brethren, in the worſhip and ordinances of the goſpel. Nor ought any thing to diſunite chriſtians, in the preſent day, ſo far as to prevent chriſtian communion together, unleſs it be ſuch fundamental errors, as leave no ground to hope that thoſe who profeſs them are real ſaints, or a true church of Chriſt. Why *may* not chriſtians, why *ought* they not, to unite with chriſtians among whom they live, in the worſhip and ordinances of the goſpel, though they may differ in ſome leſs important things?

2. From the view we have taken of the practice of the apoſtles, in regularly and orderly forming chriſtian churches, and ordaining ſtated miniſters to carry on the work of the miniſtry, in their own particular charges, we learn, that it is unſcriptural and diſorderly, for chriſtian churches willingly to remain deſtitute of a ſettled miniſtry, and to depend upon *itenerant* preachers. And it is equally unſcriptural and diſorderly, for chriſtian miniſters to travel about from place to place, under pretence of building up other churches, where chriſtian churches are already eſtabliſhed. Certainly, if it be evident and beyond all diſpute, that it is the will of

Chriſt,

Chriſt, that chriſtian churches ſhould be furniſhed with fixed and ſtated miniſters; if the apoſtles took ſpecial care that every particular church might be furniſhed with a ſettled miniſter, and conſidered things as wanting in any church where this was not done; and if there be ſuch obvious good reaſons for doing this, and ſuch manifeſt diſadvantages in neglecting it; then the conſequence is as clear as the ſun in the firmament, that it is the duty of every chriſtian church, to take all care and pains to furniſh themſelves with a ſettled miniſter, and ſteadily and faithfully to adhere to him, agreeably to the divine direction: "Know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admoniſh you; and eſteem them highly in love for their work ſake." And it is unſcriptural and diſorderly, for a church willingly to remain deſtitute of a ſettled miniſtry, and to depend upon they know not whom and what; to depend upon travelling preachers, whom they are unacquainted with, and whoſe character and conduct they are ſtrangers to; for be they ever ſo good men, ever ſo good preachers, ever ſo exemplary in their conduct, it is impoſſible for the churches to receive that benefit from them that they might, if they were fixed and ſettled among them.

Furthermore, from the care which the apoſtles took to have miniſters ſettled in every church, and from the conſideration, that almoſt all, if not every direction given to miniſters, as to their duty, ſeem evidently

evidently to reſpect them as being fixed, ſettled, and having the particular care of ſome particular church, and from all that has been ſaid above, it appears plainly unſcriptural and diſorderly, for miniſters to travel about from place to place, and eſpecially to go into places where there is a chriſtian church eſtabliſhed, with a view to draw off a party and ſet up a new church, or to induce ſome to join a diſtant church. This certainly is not to ſet in order the things that are wanting, as is the duty of a goſpel miniſter; but it is to put things out of order, and introduce confuſion in the church of Chriſt.

But it may be objected here—

It is evident that the apoſtles travelled about from place to place, preaching the goſpel, and why may not goſpel miniſters do ſo now? The anſwer is plain. Chriſtianity was then new. The apoſtles travelled to ſpread the knowledge of Chriſt, where he was not known, and where no chriſtian churches were eſtabliſhed, nor chriſtian miniſters ordained. And in this way miniſters may now travel and preach the goſpel from place to place, agreeably to the example of the apoſtles. They may now go into our new ſettlements, or among Jews, Mahometans, and Pagans, and there preach the goſpel, and erect churches, without breaking the order which Chriſt has eſtabliſhed in his ſpiritual kingdom.

But it may ſtill be ſaid, That Paul and other apoſtles did reviſit the chriſtian churches, which

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they had eſtabliſhed. True, they did, and in many inſtances, no doubt, where miniſters were ſettled. But they went to perfect what was wanting, to confirm and eſtabliſh the ſaints in their chriſtian faith, order, and obedience to thoſe who were ſet over them in the Lord; and not to make converts to a party. Paul did not go where Peter had been, and had eſtabliſhed a church, and ordained a miniſter, and endeavor ſecretly to draw away ſome from his miniſtry. The conduct of the apoſtles was far different from the modern itenerant preachers, who come in privily to interrupt the order which Chriſt has eſtabliſhed in the churches. It is, therefore, clearly evident, that it is unſcriptural and diſorderly, contrary to ſcripture example and precept, for profeſſed miniſters to go about into places, where chriſtian churches are eſtabliſhed, and regular miniſters of Chriſt ordained; and eſpecially to do this in oppoſition to, and with a deſign to draw away people from, thoſe miniſters, who have been placed in the churches, by and according to the rules of Chriſt's kingdom. And it muſt be, for the ſame reaſon, improper and diſorderly, for profeſſing chriſtians to countenance and encourage ſuch miniſters.

But it may be further objected againſt what has been ſaid,

That it is evident, that God has, in many inſtances, manifeſted his approbation of ſuch miniſters and their conduct, by bleſſing their labors, for the

conviction

conviction and converſion of ſinners, and the building up of the church of Chriſt; and can it be wrong for them to do what God owns and approves? To this I reply, Granting the premiſes to be true, the concluſion does not certainly follow. God may, and often does, bring good out of evil; but this does not deſtroy the evil, or alter the nature of men's actions; God may, and ſometimes does, accompliſh his benevolent and gracious deſigns, by wicked men and wicked means; but ſtill they are wicked men and wicked means, notwithſtanding the good effected by them. We may not do evil that good may come. If it be unſcriptural and diſorderly, for ſuch men to go about in ſuch a way as has been mentioned, we may not juſtify it, becauſe ſome good has been done by them.

But, perhaps, all that good may not be done, which we imagine. Some, poſſibly many, of thoſe whom we imagine to be converted by their means, may be deceived, may be built upon a ſandy foundation; may be but ſtony ground hearers, who will endure but for a while, and then fall away. No good effects can juſtify unchriſtian and diſorderly conduct; and it is clearly evident, that ſuch conduct is unchriſtian and diſorderly. We are expreſsly told, that in the latter days perilous times ſhall come—that there will be peculiar trials—ſuch trials as would, if it were poſſible, deceive the very elect. Theſe are the latter days; and the enemy of Chriſt and the ſouls of men is peculiarly buſy.

Every artifice is tried. Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. Let no man deceive you. Search the Scriptures. Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good. Be watchful, and ſtrengthen the things which remain, and are ready to die. Remember, therefore, how thou haſt received and heard, and hold faſt and repent. Behold, ſays Chriſt; I come quickly; hold that faſt which thou haſt; let no man take thy crown.

SERMON

SERMON XIX.

Times of Refreſhment.

ACTS iii. 19.

Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out, when the times of refreſhing ſhall come, from the preſence of the Lord.

THE preceding chapter gives us an account, of the extraordinary effuſion of the Holy Spirit on the apoſtles, and diſciples of Chriſt, by which they were, in a very extraordinary and miraculous manner, furniſhed to the arduous and important work, of building up the kingdom of the divine Redeemer. It alſo opens to view the glorious ſucceſs, which they had, in conſequence of this power, which they received from on high. The firſt diſcourſe, which Peter delivered to the people, who were preſent at the time, and who ſaw the effects of this gift of the Holy Spirit, this firſt ſermon, had ſuch an effect upon his hearers, that the ſame day there were added unto the Church, about three thouſand ſouls. This chapter opens another

pleaſing ſcene, which probably took place, towards the evening of the ſame day, when Peter and John went up to the temple to attend evening prayer. There they found, and there they wrought a ſurpriſing cure upon, a man lame from his mother's womb. This miracle arreſted the attention, and excited the admiration of the multitude, who were there convened; and afforded Peter another excellent opportunity, of preaching Jeſus, and the reſurrection from the dead, which he gladly improves. He began his diſcourſe, by diſclaiming the credit of the miracle, wrought on the lame man; aſſuring them, that it was not by their power, or holineſs, that the cure was wrought; but that God was, in this way, glorifying his Son Jeſus, in whoſe name the miracle was performed, whom they had wickedly put to death. He then calls upon them, in the words of my text, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out, when the times of refreſhing ſhall come, from the preſence of the Lord." And he follows this exhortation with all the motives and encouragements, which the goſpel exhibits. How ſurpriſing, that the firſt offers of pardon and eternal life, through the merits of Chriſt's blood, ſhould be made to thoſe wicked men, who were peculiarly inſtrumental in ſhedding it! and that theſe, or at leaſt ſome of them, ſhould be among the firſt, who experienced the ſaving benefit and efficacy of it! Surely, God's ways are not as our ways, nor

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his thoughts as our thoughts. But herein God has acted perfectly like himself; has shewn what mercy and forgiveness there are with him. And this example may afford encouragement, to the greatest of sinners, to hope in the mercy of God; and in that blood, which thus cleanses from all sin, even from the heinous sin and guilt of shedding it. But to attend more directly to the words of the text, let us

I. Inquire, what is intended by times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

II. I shall endeavor to shew, that such times of refreshing shall come. And,

III. What is personally necessary, in order to our participation of the refreshing, which they will furnish.

I. What is intended by times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord? Expositors, I believe, generally suppose, that St. Peter has particular respect to the judgment of the great day, or Christ's second personal appearance. This will undoubtedly be a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. His presence will be the refreshment of all the saints. It will complete their redemption. It is what all the saints are looking and waiting for, as the blessed hope before them. This will be the day of the restitution of all things. But I am unwilling to suppose, that the words are to be confined to this time of refreshing only. For the apostle speaks not barely of a *time* of refreshing, but of the *times* of refreshing. And it is certain, that the

church has experienced many times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; times of great joy and comfort; times of great prosperity, increase, and revival. These have been times of refreshing to the church; and the word of God gives us reason to expect, that the church will yet see a time of far greater refreshing from the presence of the Lord, than it has ever yet experienced, previous to the final appearance of Christ to judge the world.

There is, in many respects, a beautiful similarity, between the natural, and the moral world; between material and spiritual things. In the natural, or material world, all things have their periods of labor, toil, and fatigue; of depression and exhaustedness; and they have, also, their times of ease, rest, and refreshment. The natural body has its labors and toils, its pains, burdens, and sorrows; its times of weariness, hunger, and thirst. It has also its intervals of rest, ease, joy, and comfort. It has its times of refreshment, from food and drink. The same is the case with the spiritual body, or the church. This has its times of persecution and suffering; of weakness, weariness, and decay. It has, also, its times of rest, revival, and refreshment. Every one, acquainted with the sacred scriptures, is sensible, that spiritual things are there frequently compared to natural; that the gift of divine grace, and the bestowment of divine influences, are often represented by feeding the hungry, and giving drink to the thirsty. And the saints, in this life,

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are ſpoken of as hungering and thirſting; and as being fed with the bread of life, and drinking of the water of life. It is peculiar to the heavenly ſtate, to hunger no more, and thirſt no more; to eat continually of the tree of life, and to drink continually of the river of the water of life. Hence, ſpiritual bleſſings are ſpoken of as the refreſhment of chriſtians. For they give joy and comfort, new life and vigor, to the ſoul; as reſt, meat, and drink, do to the weary, hungry, and thirſty body. But reference is, perhaps, more commonly had to the material world, or the earth, which bringeth forth fruits, when a compariſon is made between earthly and ſpiritual things. This earth, we know, is often impoveriſhed and exhauſted. It needs, and it enjoys, its intervals of reſt and refreſhment. The God of nature has as wiſely ordered the revolutions of times and ſeaſons, of days and nights, for the benefit and refreſhment of the earth, as for the bodies of men. While the human body, wearied with the toils of the day, enjoys reſt and refreſhment, the earth, heated by the ſcorching ſummer ſun, and its moiſture in a meaſure is dried up, is refreſhed by the cooling ſhade and gentle dews of the evening. Under theſe metaphors, God repreſents his cheering, refreſhing, influences on his church and people. The Lord God is a ſun to his people, not only to enlighten them in their way, but to warm their hearts with divine love and grace. His divine influence, on their hearts, is often com-

pared to fire and heat; but his refreſhing influences are more frequently compared to the dews and rain. God ſays, in the beautiful language of the prophet Hoſea; "I will be as the dew unto Iſrael. He ſhall grow as the lily, and caſt forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches ſhall ſpread, and his beauty ſhall be as the olive tree, and his ſmell as Lebanon." Though they were as withered dying graſs, or as the drooping lily, ſcorched by the heat of the ſun, yet his divine influences upon them ſhould revive and refreſh them, as copious dews do the withered graſs, or dying flower. So the prophet Iſaiah, ſpeaking of ſpiritual and divine influences on the people of God, ſays, "Thy dew is as the dew of herbs," or refreſhing as the dew is to the herbs. So heavenly doctrine, or the word of God, is compared to dew, on account of its ſpiritual influence. "My doctrine ſhall drop as the rain, my ſpeech ſhall diſtil as the dew, as the ſmall rain upon the tender herb, and as the ſhowers upon the graſs." But the influences of the Divine Spirit on the hearts of men, are more frequently compared to rain, than to dew; eſpecially the plenteous effuſions of the Divine Spirit, to effect great revivals, and general reformations. Theſe are compared to large and copious ſhowers, or even floods of waters. The prophet Iſaiah, to repreſent the abundant influences of the Divine Spirit, in the goſpel day, ſays, "In the wilderneſs ſhall waters break out, and ſtreams in the deſert; and

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the parched ground ſhall become a pool, and the thirſty ground ſprings of water." So, again, "I will pour water upon him that is thirſty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my ſpirit upon thy ſeed, and my bleſſing upon thine offspring. And they ſhall ſpring up as among the graſs, as willows by the water courſes." Hence Chriſt, "on the laſt day, that great day of the feaſt, ſtood, and cried, ſaying, If any man thirſt, let him come unto me and drink." And this is the language of goſpel grace, "The Spirit and the bride, ſay, Come; and let him that heareth, ſay, Come; and let him that is athirſt come; and whoſoever will, let him come, and take the water of life freely." Thus it is clearly evident, that the influences of the Divine Spirit on the hearts of men, are compared to dews, ſhowers, rivers, wells, fountains, and ſprings of water; to denote their reviving, refreſhing, and fruitful nature. And particularly times of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and uncommon divine influences on the hearts of men, are, with beautiful propriety, called times of refreſhing.

The influences of the Divine Spirit, whenever imparted to any ſoul, are far more refreſhing to that ſoul, than reſt to the weary, or food to the hungry, or drink to the thirſty body. Hence the pſalmiſt, with reference to theſe divine influences, ſays, "There be many who ſay, Who will ſhew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou haſt put gladneſs in

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my heart, more than in the time, that their corn, and their wine increaſed." The influences of the Divine Spirit are far more refreſhing to the ſoul, than reſt to the weary, as they afford, not only joy and comfort, far beyond what any of the enjoyments of this life can give, but as they add new life and vigor to the ſoul; they give the ſoul freſh beauty, as the cooling and refreſhing dews do to the flowers of the field. And they give the ſoul new and additional ſtrength, ſo that it can mount with the wings of faith and love, as eagles, towards heaven; and can run, and not be weary, and can walk, and not faint, in the way of duty. When God ſheds his divine influences on the ſoul, in rich abundance, the ſoul is feaſted, as with marrow and fatneſs. Its joys, its comforts, its refreſhments are ſuch, as the world can neither give, nor take away. O how ſweetly refreſhing, beyond all expreſſion, are theſe divine influences! The renewed ſoul does not always feel theſe ſweetly refreſhing influences. If it did, it would anticipate the joys of heaven, and almoſt fly away from dull mortality. But it has ſome times of refreſhing, in which it can, with real feeling joy, ſay, "O taſte, and ſee, that the Lord is good." And it is truly a time of refreſhing to every particular ſoul, when that ſoul experiences the influences of the Divine Spirit, in blotting out its ſins, renewing and ſanctifying it, or increaſing and enlarging and exciting the graces of renewed nature.

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But thoſe, eſpecially, are times of refreſhing, when God is pleaſed to pour out of his Spirit, from on high, on thoſe who were before dead in treſpaſſes and in ſins: When many, in any particular town, or ſociety, are effectually awakened, convinced, converted, and brought home to God: When true religion revives, and flouriſhes; when many are added to the church, of ſuch as ſhall be ſaved. Still more are thoſe times of refreſhing, when this is the caſe in many places; when God cauſes it to rain this heavenly influence, not on one city only, but on every city. This has been, in a great meaſure, the caſe in this our happy land, as ſome of you, I truſt, can well remember: When God poured out his Spirit on moſt of our towns, and churches; and converts were multiplied, as the drops of the morning dew. That was a ſweetly refreſhing time to the church. She put on her beautiful garments, and in ſome degree "looked forth as the morning, as a morning without clouds, as the clear ſhining of the ſun after rain." But how much more emphatically will that time be a time of refreſhing, when "the Spirit ſhall be poured out upon *all fleſh*; when all fleſh ſhall ſee the ſalvation of God; and the whole earth ſhall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, even as the waters fill the ſeas." Then "ſhall the tabernacle of the Lord be with men, and God will dwell with them, and they ſhall be his people, and God himſelf ſhall be with them, and be their God."

Times of reformation, of revival of religion, of the out pouring of the Spirit on any people, are times of refreſhing to ſuch a people, not only as thoſe are refreſhed thereby, who are the happy ſubjects of theſe divine influences, in being brought out of darkneſs into light, and turned from the power of Satan unto God; but as they are reviving, refreſhing, comforting, to all the ſaints. To thoſe who have themſelves before experienced the ſame heavenly influence, it gives new and additional joy. For their higheſt joy, their greateſt comfort, their ſweeteſt delight, is to ſee the proſperity of Zion, the flouriſhing of the Redeemer's kingdom. This alſo inſpires them with freſh courage and zeal, and with additional fervor, in the ſervice of God: This affords them renewed experience of the power and grace of God, and is a new proof of the faithfulneſs of the divine promiſes. It is a refreſhment, not only to thoſe ſaints, who live where ſuch reformation takes place, and who are eye witneſſes of it; but it is, alſo, a refreſhment to all the ſaints in every part of the world, who hear of, and are made acquainted with it. For all the ſaints are members of the ſame body; and if one member rejoice, all the members rejoice with it. Yea, it may be ſaid to afford refreſhment to the ſaints and angels in heaven. For if there be joy over one ſinner that repenteth, much more, will there be joy there, when many ſinners repent, when converts are multiplied, and multitudes are joined unto the Lord.

Lord. We find, in the Revelation of St. John, that when a ſignal favor is granted to the church on earth, when it is enlarged and increaſed, when its enemies are deſtroyed, and it is in a peculiarly flouriſhing and proſperous condition, the angels have a new ſong of praiſe to ſing on the occaſion. With the utmoſt propriety, then, may ſuch times be called times of refreſhing.

It only remains here that we inquire, Why theſe times of refreſhing are ſaid to come from the preſence of the Lord? The propriety of this expreſſion will appear at once, when we conſider, that the revival of religion, the increaſe of the church, the out pouring of the Holy Spirit, is ever the work of God. And it is his moſt glorious work. "When the Lord ſhall build up Zion," ſays the pſalmiſt, "he ſhall appear in his glory." This is the moſt glorious manifeſtation, which God can make of himſelf, previous to his appearance at the judgment of the great day. When a ſoul is converted from the error of his ways, God appears in his glory to ſuch a ſoul. God manifeſts himſelf, as the moſt glorious of all beings. There is nothing that ſo clearly manifeſts the glory and perfection of the Deity, as this. The Holy Spirit, the immediate author of this divine refreſhment, comes, with all his heavenly influence, from the preſence of God. And, indeed, when and where this heavenly influence is felt, there God is, there he comes, and dwells. There he takes up his abode. So ſays

the bleſſed Savior: "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." So the forecited paſſage from the Revelation: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they ſhall be his people, and God himſelf will be with them, and will be their God."

Here we may, with propriety, make a pauſe in the diſcourſe, and indulge a profitable reflection. If the revival of religion, the out pouring of the Spirit of God, occaſions ſo much joy, comfort, and refreſhment, not only to thoſe ſouls, who are renewed thereby; but alſo to all ſaints, to the church of Chriſt in heaven, and on earth, then, how earneſtly ſhould we deſire, how fervently ſhould we pray, that not only we in this place, but that people in every place, may enjoy ſuch a time of refreſhing from the preſence of the Lord. It is uſually in anſwer to the fervent prayers of the ſaints, that God pours out his Holy Spirit on mankind; or, in other words, previous to ſuch a time of refreſhing, he commonly excites in his people an earneſt deſire, and united fervent prayer, for ſuch a bleſſing. And we are informed, that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man, even of one righteous man, availeth much. How much more the effectual fervent prayers, of many righteous men! "Shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry to him continually? Yea he will avenge them,

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and that ſpeedily." "O pray for the peace of Jeruſalem. They ſhall proſper that love thee." We pray for worldly proſperity; we ſeek for the outward honors, and enjoyments of the world. Shall we not much more ſeek the honor of God, the glory of his name, the revival of his work, and the refreſhment of his ſaints? Nothing can ſo effectually promote the refreſhment of the world as this. Let us unite our moſt fervent prayers for this greateſt of all bleſſings.

SERMON

SERMON XX.

Times of Refreſhment.

ACTS iii. 19.

Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out, when the times of refreſhing ſhall come, from the preſence of the Lord.

WE have already conſidered, what is intended, by times of refreſhing; and have found, that times of reformation, of revival of religion, of the out pouring of the Spirit, of divine influences on the hearts of men, are, with propriety, called, times of refreſhing. For they are reviving, comforting, and cheering to the ſoul, as any, and more than any outward refreſhment, can be to the body. They are refreſhing, and reviving, to the moral world, as the gentle dews, or copious ſhowers of rain, to which they are compared, are to the natural world, or to the drooping, languiſhing fruits and flowers of this earth, when parched, with the heat of a ſummer's ſun. And theſe refreſhments are, with propriety, repreſented as coming from the

preſence

preſence of the Lord, as they are the fruit and effect of his influences; they are his gift and his work; and they prove that God is eſpecially preſent with ſuch a people, and that he dwells among them. We now proceed, agreeably to the method propoſed, to ſhew,

II. That ſuch times of refreſhing ſhall come.

This is evidently ſuppoſed in the manner of expreſſion in the text. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out, when the times of refreſhing *ſhall come* from the preſence of the Lord." If there were no times of refreſhing to come, the ſtrength of the argument or motive would be loſt. Indeed that is a time of refreſhing to every particular ſoul, when it does truly repent, is converted, and its ſins are blotted out. But ſomething more than this ſeems evidently intended, and it is, as has been before obſerved, generally ſuppoſed, that St. Peter has particular reference to the judgment of the great day; when the ſins of all penitent believers will be finally blotted out from the book of God, and they refreſhed, with a complete and everlaſting fulneſs of all divine influences. But, previous to this, it is evident, that there ſhall be many times of ſweetly refreſhing influences, from the preſence of the Lord. That was a time of refreſhing, from the preſence of the Lord, when the apoſtle delivered this diſcourſe. Then, as he obſerved in the preceding chapter, God was fulfilling the promiſes made to the prophet Joel, as

well as other prophets, of the plentiful and refreſhing influences of the Divine Spirit. And he believed, yea the Spirit of Divine Inſpiration aſſured him, that there ſhould yet come times of refreſhing from the preſence of the Lord, even times of greater refreſhment than that was. Then, notwithſtanding the plentiful effuſions of the Holy Spirit, with which the church was favored, yet, it was ſcorched with the heat of perſecution. And ſince that time, the church has often experienced times of great and ſore trial and affliction. It has been often weakened, reduced extremely low. It has many times appeared to be languiſhing, drooping, dying. It has then again felt the ſweetly refreſhing influences of the Divine Spirit, reviving, reſtoring, ſtrengthening, and increaſing its beauty, and vigor. Such periods have often ſucceeded each other, ſince the day of St. Peter's delivering this diſcourſe. And it may well be queſtioned, whether there has ever been any lengthy period, in which the church has not experienced more or leſs of theſe divine refreſhments. Indeed if there were not frequent refreſhments, the church would, long ſince, have wholly died. And ſo long as the church remains on earth, there muſt be ſome meaſures and degrees of this refreſhing influence. But there have been ſome times of very great refreſhment, ſome ſeaſons of the plenteous influences of the Divine Spirit. This happy land, as well as moſt, if not all chriſtian countries, has experienced times

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of peculiar refreſhment, times of great revival of religion. And we have reaſon to hope, nay, we may with confidence expect, that there will, at leaſt, be *a time*, when all the earth ſhall feel this refreſhing. Low as the preſent ſtate of the church appears to be, and languiſhing and drooping as ſhe ſeems, almoſt ready to faint and die; yet, there are ſome happy places, which enjoy a time of great refreſhment. Divine influences are felt. Religion revives. The church raiſes its drooping head towards the heavens, from whence theſe influences come, and waits for more, and longs for a rich and full ſupply. Nor will God forſake her, nor forget her mourning ſtate.

"Zion ſtill lives within the heart
"Of everlaſting love."

Hear the language of his heart to her. "For a ſmall moment have I forſaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, for a moment; but with everlaſting kindneſs will I have mercy on thee, ſaith the Lord, thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have ſworn, that the waters of Noah ſhould no more go over the earth; ſo have I ſworn, that I would no more be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains ſhall depart, and the hills ſhall be removed; but my kindneſs ſhall not depart from thee, neither ſhall the covenant of my peace be removed, ſaith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee." So again,

"Can a woman forget her ſucking child, that ſhe ſhould not have compaſſion on the ſon of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." There are a number of great and precious promiſes in the word of God, to his church, which are yet to be fulfilled. There muſt, and will be yet a time of greater, and more general and univerſal refreſhment, than the church has ever experienced; a time, when "the goſpel ſhall be preached to every creature; when every knee ſhall bow, and every tongue confeſs that Jeſus is Chriſt, to the glory of God the Father;" when the Jews ſhall again be brought in, with the fulneſs of the Gentiles; and the coming in of the former, ſhall be as life from the dead to the latter. Theſe are promiſes, which God has made, which have not yet been fulfilled. And "God is not a man that he ſhould lie, nor the ſon of man that he ſhould repent. Hath he ſaid, and ſhall he not do it? Hath he ſpoken, and ſhall he not make it good?" The church, in almoſt every age, have believed theſe promiſes, and have been waiting for their accompliſhment. They have been looking for this bleſſed hope, this glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jeſus Chriſt. The time is indeed prefixed for the commencement of this happy refreſhment, and it is pointed out particularly by the ſpirit of prophecy. And was it not for the darkneſs and obſcurity of the language

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of prophecy, the church might certainly know when the time would be. But, notwithſtanding this darkneſs of prophetic language, it is clearly evident, that the time is drawing nigh. O that all the church of God might be prepared to welcome the glorious and happy day! This would naturally lead to the third inquiry, viz. What is perſonally neceſſary, in order to our participating in the refreſhment, which will be furniſhed. But it reoccurs to the mind, that moſt expoſitors conſider the time of refreſhing, as referring to the judgment of the great day. This will be a time of refreſhing, a time of joy and gladneſs to all the ſaints. This glorious day will complete their redemption. It will not only redeem the body from the grave, and refreſh it with unfading beauty, and immortal vigor, with eternal health, eaſe, and comfort; but it will refreſh their ſouls with the tree of life, which is in the midſt of the paradiſe of God; and with that water of life, which flows, in a never ceaſing river, from the throne of God. Then there ſhall be no more curſe. The inhabitants ſhall no more ſay, "*I am ſick.*" For the people ſhall be forgiven their iniquity. Their ſins ſhall be blotted out. All ſorrow and ſighing ſhall flee away. All tears ſhall be wiped from the eye; and divine influences ſhall be given, not as they are in this world, in an imperfect meaſure, and at ſome particular ſeaſons; but they ſhall be filled, with the fulneſs of that God, who filleth all in all. They ſhall forever enjoy God, and

to the utmoſt that their capacities will admit. They ſhall ſerve him day and night, rejoice in his preſence, and reign with him forever and ever. But even in this time of refreſhing, all ſhall not be refreſhed. Some ſhall awake to everlaſting life, and ſome to ſhame and everlaſting contempt. Our next inquiry, therefore, appears greatly important, which is,

III. What is perſonally neceſſary, in order to our participating in theſe times of refreſhing, from the preſence of the Lord? In anſwer to which, we may ſay, that the ſame is neceſſary to fit us for the joy and comfort of thoſe times of refreſhing, which the people of God enjoy on earth, which is neceſſary to fit us for the ſweeter, fuller, and more laſting refreſhments of the heavenly world, viz, That we belong to the number of God's true people, or that we repent, and be converted. Without true repentance, and converſion unto God, our ſins can never be blotted out, but they will ſtand charged to our account, and we muſt be caſt into the priſon of divine juſtice, where we muſt remain until the utmoſt farthing be paid, which can be done only by our everlaſtingly ſuffering the penalty due for our crimes. There, in that gloomy priſon of hell, no refreſhments ever come, not ſo much as a drop of water to cool the tongue, tormented with unquenchable fire. No beam of hope, no ray of joy, illuminates that doleful priſon. There none of the vain and empty enjoyments of this life, none of its

deluſive

deluſive pleaſures, can find admittance; but the ſmoke of their torment aſcendeth up forever and ever; and they have no reſt day nor night. This is the miſerable doom of all the wicked. For unleſs ye repent, ſays the Savior, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh. The deſign of all thoſe divine refreſhing influences, which God imparts to his people on earth, is to fit and prepare them for thoſe greater, richer, and ſweeter influences, which flow in, from his preſence, in the heavenly world. They are deſigned to make them meet for the inheritance of the ſaints in light. Now he that hath wrought them for the ſelfſame thing is God, who hath alſo given them his Spirit, with all its refreſhing influences. The church in this world muſt be purified and cleanſed, that it may finally be preſented a glorious church, without ſpot or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing. For this end, all that are brought into the true church of God are made truly humble, and penitent; they are converted, or turned from the love and practice of ſin, to the love and ſervice of God. They are brought to prefer God to every thing, and to rejoice in him as their chief good, and thus they are prepared to rejoice forever, in his preſence, and in the enjoyment of him.

The ſame humble, penitent heart and temper, is neceſſary, to fit the ſoul to participate, joyfully, in divine influences, or thoſe ſpiritual refreſhments, which flow from the preſence of God, in this world. "For unto this man will I look," ſays God, "even

to him that is poor, and of a contrite ſpirit, and trembleth at my word." Again, it is ſaid, "God reſiſteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." The impenitent, unrenewed heart, cannot receive the refreſhing influences of the Holy Spirit. It has no taſte nor reliſh for thoſe divine joys and conſolations, which flow from the preſence of God. It ſays unto God, "Depart from me, for I deſire not the knowledge of thy ways." But, when the ſoul is humbled, when it is brought to ſee the evil of ſin, and to hate it; when it mourns its paſt offences, and turns from them unto God; when it gives up itſelf entirely to God, and longs for none but him; then the heart is open to divine refreſhments, nor will God fail to afford them. Private chriſtians are, in this way, prepared for the reception of theſe divine influences, from God, who is preſent with them, though the world may ſee and know little of it.

The ſame ſpirit and temper of mind is neceſſary, to prepare us for the glorioufly refreſhing time, when the whole earth ſhall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, and all ſhall feel this divine refreſhment. Indeed, the deſign of this great and glorious effuſion of the Spirit, is to refreſh the world; to refreſh all nations; to cauſe all to rejoice in God. But the firſt ſtep towards this object, will be, to humble the pride of ſinners; to lead them to true repentance and converſion unto God. Before any are made to partake of divine joys and

conſolations,

conſolations, they muſt be brought to mourn and lament their ſins. They muſt feel bitterneſs of heart. They muſt be humbled, before they can be exalted. The impenitent and unrenewed are wholly unprepared for the joy and comfort, the ſweetly refreſhing influences of that happy day. The impenitent and unconverted, are not prepared to rejoice in the glorious coming and reign of the Prince of Peace. But the ſaints, all the true church and people of God, all penitent and converted ſouls, are in ſome meaſure prepared, for ſuch a glorious event; as their hearts are formed by divine grace to reliſh theſe influences. And O how ſweet will theſe refreſhments be, to the church and people of God! With heartfelt joy will they be ready to adopt the language of the holy prophet, and ſay, "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it. Shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into ſinging, ye mountains, O foreſt, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himſelf in Iſrael." And again, "Break forth into joy, ſing together, ye waſte places of Jeruſalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jeruſalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm, in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth ſhall ſee the ſalvation of our God." How happy thoſe who are prepared to welcome this glorious day! How happy thoſe, who are prepared to enjoy the comfort and refreſhment of it! Happy thoſe, who ſhall live

when

when God doth this. But ſtill more happy are thoſe, who are prepared for, and received to partake of, the more divine refreſhments of the world above.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If there be yet times of refreſhing to come from the preſence of the Lord; and theſe refreſhments afford ſo much joy and comfort, then let the believing proſpect of this afford us ſome conſolation, in the preſent gloomy ſtate of the church on earth. When we ſeriouſly contemplate the preſent ſtate of the church, in general, and the particular ſtate of this church, it appears covered with a melancholy cloud. It ſeems as though God had forgotten us, and our God had forſaken us. But God has not caſt off his church, he has not forſaken his inheritance. "In a little wrath I have hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlaſting kindneſs will I have mercy on thee, ſaith the Lord, thy Redeemer." It is true, particular churches may be loſt, or the church may be loſt in particular places; but it ſhall not be loſt from the world. And we would hope and truſt, that it will not finally be loſt, even here. A glorious and happy day of the church's proſperity ſhall come; and he that ſhall come, will come, and though he tarry, yet let us be found waiting for him. It is uſually the caſe that darkneſs precedes the light; that ſorrow precedes joy. Religion is indeed in a very low and

languiſhing

languiſhing ſtate. And while falſe prophets and teachers ariſe, and dangerous and deſtructive errors are taught, and many depart from the faith once delivered to the ſaints, and the way of truth is evil ſpoken of; while vital piety and godlineſs are renounced, from a belief, that all, of every character, however infamous, will finally be ſaved; while theſe things appear, what ſerious, what benevolent heart, can avoid being pained and diſtreſſed? But yet, in the midſt of all our grief, a firm belief, and a lively proſpect, of a time of refreſhing, from the preſence of the Lord, as certainly approaching, may, and will afford ſome comfort to every chriſtian. This may afford a pleaſing conſolation to the faithful miniſter, who is laboring and ſtriving to effect a reformation among a people, even though he ſees, for the preſent, no good effect of his labors; for they ſhall all, in ſome way or another, contribute to, and prepare for, a time of refreſhment yet to come. The ſeed may lie long buried in the duſt; but it ſhall not be loſt. Nor ſhall one prayer of the ſaint be loſt, who fervently prays for a time of refreſhing from the preſence of the Lord. Though he may poſſibly be gathered to his fathers, and laid in the duſt, before his prayers are anſwered; yet every ſuch prayer ſhall come up as a memorial before God, and ſhall there be remembered by a prayer hearing, and anſwering God, and the praying ſaint ſhall, in a ſtate of glory, be a witneſs to God's anſwering of it.

2. If

2. If repentance, and converſion to God, be ſo neceſſary to prepare us for pardon, and to partake of the joy and comfort of times of refreſhment, in this world, as well as in the world to come, then, with what propriety may I addreſs you, my friends, in the language of my text: "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out, when the times of refreſhing ſhall come from the preſence of the Lord." You have heard what is meant by times of refreſhing from the preſence of the Lord, in every ſenſe; you have heard what joyous, happy, reviving times theſe are, to every renewed ſoul in particular; as well as to the church in general; you have heard that ſuch times of refreſhment, not only have been, but are yet to come; and that, unleſs you repent, and are converted, or turned unto God, you cannot be prepared for, nor partakers of theſe divine refreſhments. What is ſin, that you ſhould be ſo fond of it? Is it not oppoſition to the bleſſed God, the fountain of all good? What are the momentary pleaſures of ſin, that you ſhould prefer them to the ſoul reviving, and refreſhing influences of the Divine Spirit? With what ſtings and laſhes of a guilty conſcience are the pleaſures of ſin followed, while the love and ſervice of God is attended with the nobleſt joy and comfort? What evils and miſeries has ſin already brought upon our guilty world? And how many millions, of the human race, has it already ſunk down into endleſs miſery? On the

other

other hand, repentance and converſion have ſaved thouſands from theſe torments, have procured the ſweeteſt divine influence, joy, and comfort, in this world, and endleſs refreſhment, from thoſe rivers of pleaſure, which flow at God's right hand, in heaven above. Would you avoid the endleſs pain and miſery of the wicked, would you enjoy thoſe divine, and ſoul reviving, and happifying refreſhments, which flow from the preſence of God, then repent, and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

SERMON

SERMON XXI.

Fidelity in Preaching Desirable.

WHEN I rise in this sacred Desk, you naturally expect that I call your attention to some particular passage of sacred scripture; and that I address you on some religious subject. This you consider as the proper duty of my office, as if it were my trade, my employment: But should I do this, as most men go about their worldly business, merely to get a living, I should certainly be highly and peculiarly criminal. No man may, at any time, lawfully act from this motive in any thing. We are commanded to aim at the glory of God, in every thing we do. Were we made only for this world, we might then live and act for this world only; but it is certain we are not. There is, my friends, a vast, a boundless, an all important eternity before us; and every thing we do, every thing we say, and every thing we think, will have influence into that future and everlasting state, and increase our happiness or misery there forever. How important then is life! how important every

day,

day, hour and moment of life! How important is it that I preach, and that you hear, as thoſe who muſt give account to God the judge of all! In this view of things, what portion of ſcripture can be more proper for our preſent contemplation, than thoſe words of old Eli to young Samuel, recorded in the firſt book of Samuel, iiid chapter, and 17th verſe?

What is the thing that the Lord hath ſaid unto thee? I pray thee, hide it not from me; God do ſo to thee, and more alſo, if thou hide any thing from me, of all the things that he ſaid unto thee.

THE occaſion of theſe words you will eaſily recollect. Eli had, but a little before, been informed, by a man of God, of judgments ſoon to come upon his family, for the great wickedneſs and impiety of his children. This prediction was confirmed to Samuel, in a manner deſcribed in the preceding part of this chapter. On a certain night, when Eli and Samuel were both lain down to reſt, each one in his ſeparate apartment, the Lord called and ſaid, Samuel; and Samuel anſwered, Here am I; and he ran to Eli and ſaid, Here am I, for thou calledſt me. Eli ſaid, I called not; lie down again. No ſooner had Samuel lain down, but the voice called again, Samuel! He went to Eli as before, and was informed as before. The ſame was done three times. Eli was then convinced, that it was God who ſpake to Samuel; and he told him, that if he

ſhould

ſhould hear the voice calling him again, to reply, "Speak, Lord, for thy ſervant heareth." He departed and lay down, and the Lord called the fourth time, Samuel! Samuel! Then Samuel anſwered, "Speak, Lord, for thy ſervant heareth." God now informs Samuel of his determination to fulfil all that he had before denounced againſt the houſe of Eli. Samuel after this lay until the morning, and when he aroſe he was afraid to inform Eli what he had heard. Eli having juſt before received a diſagreeable meſſage from the man of God, was apprehenſive that the viſion of Samuel foreboded evil to himſelf; and therefore he calls for Samuel, and addreſſes him in the language of our text. "What is the thing that the Lord hath ſaid unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me; God do ſo to thee, and more alſo, if thou hide any thing from me, of all the things that he ſaid unto thee." Eli was truly deſirous of knowing the worſt of his caſe, and not only requeſted Samuel to deal plainly and faithfully with him—"I pray thee hide it not from me"—but he moſt ſolemnly adjures him to do it, under the awful penalty of feeling the curſe himſelf, if he concealed the truth—"God do ſo to thee, and more alſo, if thou hide any thing from me, of all the things that he ſaid unto thee." Whereupon Samuel told him every whit. Like a faithful watchman, he did not ſhun to declare unto him all the counſel of God. In treating on this ſolemn paſſage, I ſhall purſue the following method.

I. Show

I. Show that it is of the greateſt importance to a people in general, and to every particular perſon, that miniſters be plain and faithful in delivering the truth to them.

II. That ſuch as are truly wiſe will wiſh and deſire this of their miniſters—"I pray thee hide it not from me."

III. That an awful curſe awaits thoſe miniſters, who are unfaithful in declaring the counſel of God, or who keep back the truth—"God do ſo to thee, and more alſo, if thou hide any thing from me, of all the things that he ſaid unto thee."

I. That it is of the greateſt importance to a people in general, as well as to every particular perſon, that miniſters be plain and faithful in delivering the truth to them; that they do not conceal the worſt of their caſe from them.

The truth of this propoſition muſt appear evident to every one, who duly conſiders it. God, in infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, has ſeen fit to reveal to mankind many things, which greatly concern their preſent and future happineſs, and which it would have been impoſſible for them to have known, had he not revealed them. Or if any truths of divine revelation could have been known without a revelation; yet they could not certainly have been ſo clearly and diſtinctly known, as they may be now. Every thing, that God has revealed in his word, concerns us, and concerns us in our eternal intereſt. "Secret things belong unto the

Lord our God, but thoſe things which are reveal-ed belong unto us, and to our children." Whatever God has ſeen fit to reveal muſt certainly be worthy of our notice; if it had been of no importance to us to know it, ſurely God would not have revealed it; for he does nothing in vain. Can any one ſuppoſe, that God ſhould ſpeak any thing that is not worthy of the attention of his creatures? Shall he call and ſay, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear?" and can we ſuppoſe it is of no conſequence whether we hear or not? A divinely inſpired apoſtle has aſſured us, that "all ſcripture is given by inſpiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furniſhed unto all good works." If ſo, then, it is important for us to know the ſcripture, to be well acquainted with the whole will of God. Beſides, there is ſuch a beauty, ſuch a harmony and connection in the whole revealed will of God, that no one can know any thing as he ought to know, who does not know the whole. The proper knowledge of any one truth of divine revelation involves in it the knowledge of the whole. How can any one underſtand the goſpel method of ſalvation, by the free grace of God through a Redeemer, unleſs he knows the wretched and deplorable condition into which man is fallen? And this implies the knowledge of the amazing depravity of the human heart, man's utter

averſion

averſion from God, his helpleſs ſtate in himſelf, his need of the power and grace of God in regeneration, and the free, rich and ſovereign grace of God in the ſanctification and complete ſalvation of ſaints in heaven. There is, therefore, ſuch a connection of one truth with another, that the whole goſpel plan or ſcheme muſt be unfolded in order to our properly underſtanding any part of it. And it has pleaſed God to appoint an order of men, whoſe particular work and office it ſhould be, to ſtudy the ſacred ſcriptures, to ſearch out the mind and will of God, as it is revealed in his holy word, and to unfold the myſteries of godlineſs to mankind. Nothing, therefore, is more evident, than that plainneſs and fidelity in miniſters is of great importance—that they do not handle the word of God deceitfully—that they do not corrupt the word of God; but as in ſincerity, but as of God, in the ſight of God, they ſpeak the truth in Chriſt; and by manifeſtation of the truth, commend themſelves to every man's conſcience in the ſight of God. The deſign of the goſpel miniſtry is not anſwered, if the preacher be not plain and faithful in his preaching: On the contrary, the ſouls of men are injured, the goſpel miniſtry is perverted, and the cauſe of Satan promoted, by the unfaithful preacher. Truth is the great ſupport of Chriſt's kingdom. Truth affects the hearts of men. It is the truth that humbles the ſinner's heart, ſtrips him of all his excuſes, lays him at the

foot of a ſovereign God, and makes him free from the law of ſin and death. How important is it, then, that the truth be clearly, plainly, and faithfully preached? So far as the truth is kept out of ſight, ſo far Satan's kingdom and cauſe are ſupported. His kingdom is a kingdom of falſehood; he keeps ſinners quiet and ſecure, by blinding their minds, and ſhutting the light of divine truth from their underſtanding. Hence ſinners are ever repreſented as having their underſtandings darkened, their eyes cloſed and ſhut—as ignorant, blind, and walking in darkneſs. The deſign of the goſpel miniſtry is to open blind eyes, to give light to them who are in darkneſs, and to bring men to the knowledge of the truth. This can be done only by preaching the truth clearly and plainly. Nothing, then, can be more deſirable than to have the truth taught in the moſt plain and faithful manner. He, who diſguiſes the truth, and keeps back any part of the whole counſel of God, does the greateſt injury to the ſouls of men. Truth will come to light, it will one day appear, and ſinners will be made to ſee and feel it. If we conceal it from you now, for fear of offending or diſpleaſing you, it will all appear, if not before, yet at the judgment of the great day. And the manifeſtation of the truth *then*, will overwhelm the guilty ſoul with unutterable anguiſh. It will carry ſuch conviction to the conſcience, as forever to ſilence all his excuſes and all his complaints. If we conceal from you, or endeavor

deavor to extenuate the wretchedneſs of your condition; if we pretend that you are not ſo very bad, not ſo entirely corrupt and depraved, not ſuch enemies to God as ſome aſſert; yet the truth of your character, and the dreadfulneſs of your condition, will hereafter appear in a more awful light than they can now be repreſented. It is, therefore, a matter of the utmoſt importance and conſequence to you, that we do not, in any meaſure, conceal your character from you, that we do not repreſent your condition any better than it is; but that we plainly and faithfully tell you what you are, and what you have to expect. In this way, we may become the happy inſtruments of awakening, convincing, and converting you; of turning you from the error of your ways, to the wiſdom of the juſt. I proceed,

II. To ſhow that ſuch as are truly wiſe will wiſh and deſire miniſters to preach plainly and faithfully. They will adopt the language of Eli to Samuel in the text. "What is the thing that the Lord hath ſaid unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me."

It is poſſible that every one may think that he deſires this; but it is not poſſible that it ſhould be true, that every one does deſire it. There is ſomething in the truth too painful to the wicked hearts of men to make them love it. The light of divine truth, when let into the heart of the ſinner, diſcovers ſuch a dreadful ſight, opens to his view

ſuch an awful ſcene, that he cannot bear to behold it. He ſhuts his eyes againſt it, he turns away from it, and endeavors to perſuade himſelf, that it is all deluſion, that it is only the imagination of a diſordered mind. That this is the truth, I appeal to Chriſt, the faithful and true witneſs. He ſays, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved." And Chriſt had abundant reaſon to bear ſuch a teſtimony, not only becauſe he knew the hearts of men, but becauſe he ſaw them act out this character in their conduct towards him. He came a light into the world; he taught the truth in the cleareſt and plaineſt manner; he ſet before ſinners their true character; therefore they hated him, and told him that he reproached them—they were offended at him, and ſought to kill him. And it has ever been found to be the caſe, in every age of the world, that plain and faithful preaching will give offence to many. But this does by no means prove, that ſuch preaching is not deſirable, and that thoſe who are truly wiſe will not deſire it. It is deſirable, and thoſe who are truly wiſe will deſire it, as much as Eli deſired Samuel to be plain and faithful with him, in telling him every thing that God had ſaid concerning him.

This they will deſire,

1. Becauſe

1. Becauſe they know that every thing which God has ſaid is true, that it is worthy of their notice, and that it is important to them to attend to.

There is nothing, which God has revealed in his word, but what is true. All his declarations are true—all his promiſes are true—and all his threatenings are true. It is impoſſible for God to lie, or to deceive. He does not need falſehood or deceit to carry on his cauſe and ſupport his kingdom. He does not need to terrify or frighten men with dreadful deſcriptions and repreſentations of what ſhall never come to paſs; but when he tells us what ſinful creatures we are, how odious ſin is in his ſight, what it deſerves, and what the ſinner ſhall actually meet with if he continues in it, he does this that we may not be ignorant of ourſelves; that we may not go blindfold to deſtruction; that we may not ſay that he did not give us warning of our danger. And ſuch as are truly wiſe are ſenſible of this; they know that it is important that they become acquainted with their true character, and that they know the whole truth that reſpects them. They are ſenſible that the truths of God's word are realities, and that they are infinitely worthy of their notice. They will, therefore, deſire to hear and know the mind and will of God; they will prize his word above gold; yea, above much fine gold. They will be ready to ſay, "Speak, Lord, for thy ſervant heareth;" they will watch the prieſt's lips, and ſeek the law at his mouth; they

will ſit as at the feet of Chriſt to hear him. They find that truth is ſweet, and in itſelf deſirable; and the ſoul is fed and nouriſhed by it. "As new born babes they deſire the ſincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby." They, therefore, ſeek for knowledge as for ſilver, and ſearch for it, as for hid treaſures; they delight in the word of God, and meditate in it day and night. This leads me to add,

2. Such as are wiſe will deſire miniſters to be faithful, becauſe of the benefit and advantage which they find from plain and faithful preaching.

It is certain that the great deſign of the inſtitution of the goſpel miniſtry is to promote the good and benefit of mankind, and the edification of the Church, which is the body of Chriſt. And the more plain and faithful miniſters are, the more good they will do. There is a much greater probability, that ſinners will be awakened, convinced and converted, under plain and faithful preaching, than under that which is more looſe, declamatory, and indefinite. It is true, it is not in the power of the moſt plain and faithful preacher to ſpeak to the hearts of men. Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but it is God who muſt give the increaſe. The excellency of the power is not of man but of God. Yet, as God ordinarily makes uſe of ſecond cauſes to effect his purpoſes; ſo there is a much greater probability that faithful and plain preachers will be ſucceſsful, than thoſe who daub with untempered

mortar.

mortar. Hence the apoſtle Paul exhorts Timothy to be faithful from this conſideration. "Take heed unto thyſelf, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: For in doing this thou ſhalt both ſave thyſelf and them that hear thee." Every one, therefore, that truly deſires an intereſt in the benefits and bleſſings of the goſpel, and that ſalvation which it contains and reveals, will ſincerely deſire, that miniſters ſhould preach plainly and faithfully. Though ſuch plain and faithful preaching may give pain, though it may awaken conſcience to condemn them; yet they know that this is neceſſary in order to their ſpiritual healing. The ſick man knows that it is neceſſary for him to take diſagreeable medicines, in order to his recovery; and if he is wiſe he will wiſh the phyſician, not to conſult his preſent appetite, not to conſider what will be moſt agreeable, but what will be the moſt beneficial. So the wounded man will deſire the ſurgeon to ſearch his wound thoroughly, and to make proper applications, with reſpect to his complaints. And ſo will the truly wiſe do, with reſpect to their ſpiritual phyſician. They will wiſh the miniſter to deal plainly and faithfully with them; not to flatter them with hopes of peace and ſafety in a Chriſtleſs ſtate; not to ſmooth over things, and leave them to periſh in their ſins; but to make them ſee the worſt of their caſe, and tell them the whole counſel of God—"I pray thee hide it not from me." But the real chriſtian, in particular,

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whoſe heart has felt the transforming power and influence of divine light and truth, will eſpecially deſire the moſt plain and faithful preaching of the word. He finds, by his own happy experience, that ſuch preaching makes him wiſer and better; he grows up under it in knowledge and grace. He learns more of God, ſees more of the glory of the divine nature and character, and God appears more glorious, amiable, and excellent. He ſees more of the perfection of the ways and works of God, the beauty, harmony, and conſiſtency of his great plan, as it is revealed in his word. And even the awful diſplays of God's vindictive juſtice tend to fill his mind with the greater awe and reverence of the divine character. In a word, he finds that the plain and faithful diſpenſation of the word of God, ſerves to awaken him to a holy fear, leſt he ſhould finally come ſhort of eternal life; that it animates him to diligence and fidelity in his chriſtian courſe; that it inſpires him with ardent deſires of growth in grace; that it increaſes his joy and comfort, and affords him daily delight in the houſe of his pilgrimage. The more clearly, plainly, and faithfully, the whole counſel of God is exhibited to view, and the more the truths of his word are opened and explained, the more proficiency he makes in the divine life, and finds and feels that he is ripening and preparing for that happy ſtate, where he ſhall ſee, not through a glaſs darkly, but face to face; where he ſhall ſee as he

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is ſeen, and know, even as alſo he is known; where all the miſts of ignorance and error, which now darken the counſel of God, and make myſteries in his word, ſhall be diſpelled, and unclouded light beam fully and clearly upon his raviſhed ſoul. This will conſtitute one important part of the happineſs of heaven; and for this reaſon, the more a chriſtian deſires to be prepared for the ſtate of the bleſſed, the more he will deſire that miniſters ſhould unfold the great truths of the goſpel, and preach in the moſt plain, faithful, and edifying manner.

SERMON

SERMON XXII.

Fidelity in Preaching Defirable.

1 SAMUEL, iii. 17.

What is the thing that the Lord hath ſaid unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do ſo to thee, and more alſo, if thou hide any thing from me, of all the things that he ſaid unto thee.

THERE can ſcarcely be a greater bleſſing to any people, than a wiſe, prudent, and faithful miniſter; one who is truly acquainted with the word of God; who knows how to open and explain the ſacred Scriptures, to repreſent divine truth in the cleareſt and plaineſt light; and who is not afraid or aſhamed to do this. On the other hand, there can ſcarcely be a greater curſe to a people, than a teacher or inſtructor in religion, who is ignorant, unſkilful, and unfaithful. He, who is ignorant of divine truth himſelf, can never give light and knowledge to others. He may amuſe and he may pleaſe, but he cannot profit; he will lead his hearers in the dark, and there is

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the utmoſt danger leſt blackneſs and darkneſs, forever, be the portion of both miniſter and people. Miniſters are ſet up to ſhine as lights in the world; they are called the light of the world; if, therefore, the light that is in them be darkneſs, how great is that darkneſs! But we are not without temptations to be unfaithful; yea, the temptations are many and great. It is by no means deſirable to be the bearer of evil tidings; it is not pleaſing to deliver things that will give offence to any; it would be more agreeable to propheſy ſmooth things, and to ſpeak peace and ſafety, as the falſe prophets did, and like them to gain the good will of the people. And the temptation is the greater, when this is the moſt common and faſhionable way. How great was the temptation to Micaiah, to join with the multitude of falſe prophets, in encouraging Ahab to go up to battle againſt Ramoth Gilead? They all with one voice bid him go and proſper. He aſks Micaiah. Micaiah knew that the king hated him, and would not be likely to pay any regard to what he ſaid, if he did not agree with the reſt. He, therefore, at firſt, bids him go and proſper. It is probable, however, that by the manner of his ſpeaking, Ahab queſtioned whether he was in earneſt, and therefore ſaid, "How many times ſhall I adjure thee, that thou tell me nothing but that which is true, in the name of the Lord?" Micaiah now feels the importance of plainly and faithfully delivering the word of God; and he does it, though he incurs the

wrath

wrath and diſpleaſure of the king. The prophet Jeremiah was in a ſimilar ſituation, and conducted in a ſimilar manner. Miniſters, like other perſons, are not fond of ſpeaking things that will give pain and offence; they do not love to provoke the wrath and reſentment of men. Samuel was afraid, as we are informed, to ſhew Eli the viſion which he had ſeen, or to declare what God had told him concerning him. Not, probably, afraid that Eli would be angry with him, for this was inconſiſtent with Eli's character as a good man; but he was afraid to grieve and trouble the good old man. He knew that Eli had before been informed of judgments to come upon his houſe, and if he were now forward to be the bearer of theſe evil tidings, it might look as though he hoped to build his own family on the ruins of Eli's. But Eli was deſirous of knowing the worſt of his caſe, as we before obſerved, and, therefore, he not only earneſtly entreats him not to hide it from him; but alſo ſolemnly adjures him, in God's name, and on penalty of the divine diſpleaſure, to be plain and faithful in delivering the meſſages of heaven. "God do ſo to thee, and more alſo, if thou hide any thing from me, of all the things that he ſaid unto thee."

You, doubtleſs, remember the method propoſed; agreeably to which we have ſhown, that it is of the greateſt importance to a people in general, and to every particular perſon, that miniſters be

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plain and faithful in delivering the truth to them; and that ſuch as are truly wiſe will wiſh and deſire this of their miniſters. I now proceed to ſhow,

III. That an awful curſe awaits thoſe miniſters, who are unfaithful in delivering the counſel of God, or who keep back or conceal the truth from their hearers—"God do ſo to thee, and more alſo, if thou hide any thing from me, of all the things that he ſaid unto thee." As if he had ſaid, "I doubt not but God has told thee of awful judgments, which he is about to bring upon my wicked family, but I wiſh to know them; and may all the judgments, great and dreadful as they may be, fall and light upon your head, if you conceal them from me." Such ſhall the doom be of every one, who is unfaithful in delivering the meſſages of God. If miniſters do not warn ſinners of the wrath of God, which is coming upon them, they bring upon themſelves that wrath and curſe, which they ſhould have denounced in God's name, againſt thoſe who go on ſtill in their treſpaſſes. This is agreeable to the declaration of God to the prophet Ezekiel. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the houſe of Iſrael; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I ſay unto the wicked, thou ſhalt ſurely die; and thou giveſt him not warning, nor ſpeakeſt to warn the wicked from his wicked way to ſave his life; the ſame wicked man

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ſhall die in his iniquity ; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedneſs, nor from his wicked way, he ſhall die in his iniquity ; but thou haſt delivered thy ſoul." It appears, then, that an awful and aggravated curſe awaits thoſe, who are unfaithful in delivering the meſſages of God to the people, to whom they are called to miniſter. But in order to ſet this truth in the cleareſt point of light, you will ſuffer me to obſerve,

That the work of the miniſtry reſpects the greateſt of all public concerns, or it reſpects the higheſt poſſible intereſts of mankind, as well as the honor and glory of God—that love to men, as well as a regard to the glory of God, requires miniſters to be faithful in it—that God has expreſsly enjoined fidelity upon them—and that he has denounced the moſt awful threatenings againſt thoſe who are unfaithful.

Fidelity in every kind of buſineſs and employment is required of every man, by the laws of nature, of nations, and of God. And he who is unfaithful in any kind of buſineſs entruſted to him, is an odious character ; he deſerves to be deſpiſed by every good being in the univerſe. But the ſin of unfaithfulneſs increaſes, in proportion to the importance of the truſt committed to our charge. He who is unfaithful in improving the goods or worldly eſtate of another, which is committed to his truſt, is juſt-

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ly odious in all civilized ſociety. He, who is unfaithful in preſerving the life and health of another, which is committed to his truſt, is ſtill more criminal than the former. But he, who is unfaithful to the ſouls of men, is of all others the moſt criminal, becauſe theſe are infinitely more important than every thing elſe. For one ſoul is of more value than all the wealth of the world. The goſpel miniſtry is certainly deſigned to promote the ſalvation of ſouls, and primarily and immediately reſpects the great things of our everlaſting peace. He, therefore, who is unfaithful in the miniſtry, is unfaithful to the ſouls of men. He does, as it were, defraud men, not of their daily bread, but of the bread of life. He keeps from them that proviſion, which God has made, and which, as a faithful ſteward, he ought to give them to live upon forever. He ſtarves and famiſhes their ſouls. And God is hereby robbed of that honor and glory, which is due to him, not only from the unfaithful miniſter, but from his people, whom he ought to have endeavored to lead, by his preaching, to glorify God, both with their bodies and ſpirits, which are his. A regard to the honor and glory of God, therefore, as well as love to mankind, ſtrongly urges fidelity upon the preacher. Can it be ſuppoſed, that any man truly loves his neighbor, who is not concerned for his happineſs, and who will not do any thing in his power to promote it? Moſt certainly, that man gives a poor proof of the kindneſs and goodneſs of

his heart, who can ſee his neighbor in the utmoſt danger, and yet take no care nor pains to ſave him from ruin. Love to the ſouls of men will lead every faithful miniſter to do every thing in his power, to ſave them from eternal death. He will not ſhun to declare unto them all the counſel of God, nor ceaſe to warn them night and day; nor can he be faithful to God, nor to the ſouls of men, nor even to his own ſoul, if he neglects to do this. For, God has expreſsly enjoined fidelity upon him. The directions to fidelity to men of every claſs and character are many, but to miniſters they are ſtill more numerous and pointed. It may ſuffice, however, to mention a few. "Take heed, therefore, unto yourſelves, and to all the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghoſt hath made you overſeers, to feed the church of God. Take heed to thyſelf and to thy doctrine. Labor in word and doctrine. Study to ſhew thyſelf approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be aſhamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Preach the word; be inſtant in ſeaſon and out of ſeaſon, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long ſuffering and doctrine." They are directed "to cry aloud, and ſpare not, to lift up their voices like a trumpet, to ſhew God's people their tranſgreſſions, and the houſe of Iſrael their ſins; to cauſe them to know their abominations; to ſpeak God's word faithfully." And the forecited paſſage from Ezekiel is, if poſſible, more expreſs and full than any which have juſt been

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mentioned. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman," &c.

Here we see that the injunctions to fidelity in ministers are enforced by the most awful sanctions. The blood of those who perish, through their unfaithfulness, will be required at their hands. And if no one can bear the wrath of God due to him, how can ministers bear the accumulated weight of the sins of others? If God denounces judgments against others, and they refuse to declare them, God will do so to them and more also; greater and more awful curses shall light upon them. St. Paul, in God's name, curses those who preach another gospel. And St. John says, in the conclusion of the cannon of Scripture, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." Who can tell how many curses the unfaithful minister shall have in a world of misery, from those who perish through his unfaithfulness! How will such curse him for concealing from them the truth of their character and situation; and how tormenting must it be to hear them say, If you had done your duty, and dealt plainly and faithfully with us, we might have escaped this everlasting torment! How dreadful then will be the condition of the unfaithful

miniſter, who keeps back the truth from his hearers! And how important is it, both to miniſters and people, that miniſters be plain and faithful in their preaching! O, that we might all feel the importance of this ſubject!

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Preaching is a ſolemn buſineſs, it is truly an important work!

I doubt not but you are ready to think, that it is really ſolemn and important to the preacher. But let me tell you, that it is more than probable that you do not always view it in this light, that you do not always feel ſenſible of it. Preaching is not deſigned for an amuſement; it is not deſigned merely to paſs away the Sabbath, which hangs heavily upon thoſe, who have not this to while away the time. But it is a divine appointment, and deſigned for the ſpiritual good and benefit of mankind. It is one part of that plan, which infinite wiſdom has deviſed for the recovery of a loſt and ruined world; and the ordinary method, in and by which ſinners are converted to God, and prepared for heaven. It is, therefore, too ſolemn a buſineſs to be trifled with. It ought not to be performed by ſuch as take no care and pains to prepare for it, and who ſay any thing and every thing, as it comes to mind in the moment of ſpeaking; and whoſe ſermons, or rather whoſe talking (for it is not fit to be called a ſermon) is like the original chaos, without form and void, and darkneſs

neſs is upon the face of it. Such diſcourſes cannot give light or inſtruction.

Preaching is alſo too ſolemn a buſineſs, to be performed only to give leſſons of heathen morality. The goſpel preacher muſt collect his ſermons from the ſacred ſcriptures, and not from the writings of Seneca, Plato, Confucius, or any other human compoſitions. He muſt unfold the great myſteries of godlineſs, and preach the truth as it is in Jeſus. You muſt expect to hear truths that are not pleaſing to the carnal heart. You muſt expect that the faithful preacher will come home to your conſciences; that he will ſhew you your ſins; that he will endeavor to make you feel them, and convince you of your guilt and danger. The miniſter, who never takes pains to convince ſinners of their guilty and miſerable condition, can never be a faithful and profitable preacher. He will never lead ſinners to Chriſt; for the whole need not a phyſician, but they that are ſick; and they muſt be ſenſible that they are ſick, before they will apply to a phyſician. If you are ſenſible that preaching is indeed ſuch a ſolemn and important work, you will wiſh your preacher to feel it, and to be plain and faithful in his preaching. You will wiſh him to keep back nothing that is profitable for you. You will wiſh him not to confer with fleſh and blood, but to conſult the word of God, and to declare his meſſages plainly and faithfully. Hence we are led to reflect,

2. That it is a ſolemn thing to hear preaching, or it is a matter of great importance how we hear. If it were not a matter of importance how we hear; if it were not a ſolemn thing to ſit under the plain and faithful preaching of the word, it would not be ſuch a ſolemn and important thing to preach. Much of the ſolemnity and importance of preaching ariſes from the effect which it has upon the hearers. Therefore, it is a ſolemn thing to hear preaching, and eſpecially to hear plain and faithful preaching. It would not be a ſolemn and important thing, to preach to the walls, or to preach to beaſts; but it is to preach to men; becauſe it will have ſome great effect, either good or bad. Hence it appears to be important to hear. It is a ſolemn conſideration, that every ſermon you hear will have ſome effect upon you. You cannot hear a plain and faithful ſermon, without being made better or worſe by it. If you are not benefited by it, you will be the worſe, you will be more criminal, you will be more hardened in ſin.

And you are alſo to remember, that you muſt give an account to God, for the improvement of every advantage you enjoy. If you abuſe the means of grace which you enjoy, if you refuſe the calls and invitations of the goſpel, if you ſlight and deſpiſe the warnings and admonitions, which God ſends you; you will find, that you have a dreadful account to give at a future day. Only allow that preaching is a divine appointment, that it is an in-

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ſtituted mean of grace, and deſigned for the good of mankind; and you muſt at once be convinced, that it is a matter of importance that you attend upon preaching; that you do not needleſsly abſent yourſelves from it; that you come with a teachable temper and diſpoſition; that you be willing to hear and know all the Lord hath ſaid; that you do not quarrel and contend with the truth; that you do not ſhut your eyes againſt it—but that you receive it with faith and love, lay it up in your hearts, and practiſe it in your lives. If you can now ſit and hear the moſt plain and faithful preaching, and remain unmoved and unaffected by it; if you can now hear the moſt ſolemn and important truths delivered, and yet not feel the weight and power of them; yet, the time will come, when you muſt feel the power of truth. Truth will appear at the judgment of the great day, if it does not before, and it will make men feel then, if it does not now. If it be of any importance, that miniſters be faithful to the ſouls of men in their preaching, (as I doubt not but you think it is) then it muſt be of importance to their hearers, that they be faithful to their own ſouls in hearing. You muſt let the word of God ſink down into your ears and into your hearts, and conſider yourſelves as deeply intereſted in it. You need to be extremely careful not to determine, that any thing is not true, becauſe you are unwilling that it ſhould be true, becauſe you do not love it, becauſe it is

againſt you. It is not uncommon for men to find fault with the truth, to complain of preaching, becauſe it does not ſuit their corrupt hearts. But if you would act a wiſe and faithful part to yourſelves, you muſt be willing to come to the light, and let the light of divine truth come home to your hearts. You muſt not act like children, who cannot bear to have their wounds dreſſed, becauſe it hurts them and makes them ſmart; but you muſt be willing to ſuffer pain now, rather than bear it to all eternity.

And now let me put the queſtion to each one in this aſſembly, Can you really and heartily adopt the language of the text, and ſay, "What is the thing that the Lord hath ſaid unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me!" Or, in other words, Do you wiſh me to be a plain and faithful preacher? Do you wiſh me to deliver the whole counſel of God, to keep back nothing of all that God has ſaid? Do you wiſh to be dealt plainly with, and to have your true character ſet before you, and your dreadful condition deſcribed? Will you not quarrel with me if I do this? Or if you do not quarrel and contend with me, yet will you not ſecretly and in heart find fault with the truth? You cannot but own, that it is deſirable to have the truth preached; to have it preached plainly and faithfully too. You cannot but own, that it is a ſolemn thing to do this, both to me and to you. Will you then ſuffer me to deal thus plainly and

faithfully

faithfully with you? I will not say, that I have been the faithful Minister, that I have in any respect done my duty as I ought—I know that in many things I offend, and in all things come short—But I think I can say, that I have not knowingly concealed the truth, and kept it back from you. I have meant to be plain and faithful in my preaching; and in doing this no doubt I have displeased some. But shall I, for fear of this, neglect my duty? Shall I be less plain and faithful, for fear of giving you uneasiness? This would be unkind to you, offensive to God, and injurious to my own soul, as well as yours. Rather let me be, if possible, more plain, more clear and full in representing the misery and danger of a natural state and condition. And let me entreat those of you, who are sensible of this deplorable situation of sinners, that you would beg of God to make me more faithful in preaching his word, and delivering his messages to the people. Suffer me further to ask you, Whether you have been faithful in hearing the word of God? Have you attended to the preaching of it, as you ought to do? Have you applied divine truths to your hearts? Have you carefully sought for instruction? Have you given truth a friendly reception, and fed upon it for your spiritual nourishment? Certainly this has not been the case with all of you. If it had been, there would have been more real religion, more true, vital piety than is found among us. Where

is the appearance of your profiting by my miniſtry? Is the fault in me alone? Is it not in any part in you? Let us each one aſk his own heart, Is not the fault in me? It will not be long, that I ſhall have an opportunity to preach, or you to hear. It will not be long, before we muſt all appear before our Judge, to give an account how we have preached and heard. It will, my hearers, be a ſolemn day, when we ſhall meet before the bar of God—when this day, which we now enjoy, and this hour in the houſe of God, will come into view—when this ſermon will come to light, and it will be certainly known, whether I have been plain and faithful in preaching it, and whether you have been faithful in hearing it. For all theſe things God will bring us into judgment. In the view of this awful day, and of this ſolemn account, let me call upon you today to hear the voice of God, and not harden your hearts againſt his calls. Let me call upon you now to repent, and believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt with all your hearts. Let me tell you, that now is the accepted time, and now is the day of ſalvation; that if you will not accept of his offered grace today, you may juſtly be denied any lot or portion in it tomorrow. For he that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, ſhall ſuddenly be deſtroyed, and that without remedy.

SERMON

SERMON XXIII.

Truth Painful to a Wicked Heart.

ACTS, ii. 37.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the reſt of the apoſtles, Men and brethren, what ſhall we do?

THE event here referred to is this. The diſciples of Chriſt, agreeable to the direction of their Divine Maſter, given when he was taken up from them, were waiting at Jeruſalem for the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, which was, in a ſingular and miraculous manner, ſhed down, to furniſh them for the work, which Chriſt had aſſigned them. On the day of Pentecoſt, a feaſt day, when there was a large and unuſual collection of people, from all parts of the country, and alſo a great number of proſelytes from many other nations, and when all theſe, with the diſciples, were collected in one place, the promiſed communication was granted, in the appearance of cloven tongues as of fire, which ſat upon each of them, and they were filled

with

with the Holy Ghoſt; and began to ſpeak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. So that thoſe, of every nation, who were preſent, heard them, each one in his tongue or language. This diverſity of languages, ſpoken by them, appeared to ſome to be only a confuſion of noiſe, and they imputed it to the diſciples being drunken. Upon this impious ſuggeſtion, Peter aroſe, and the other diſciples ariſing to ſupport him, he addreſſed the multitude, in a moſt ſerious, ſolemn, and affecting manner; aſſuring them that the aſtoniſhing ſcene, to which they were witneſſes, was not the effect of intemperance, but the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy of Joel, which was to be accompliſhed in the latter days. He then proceeds to preach Jeſus, and his reſurrection from the dead; and to aſſure them, that what they now ſaw and heard was indeed the work of Chriſt, the gift of that Holy Spirit, which Chriſt had received from God, and which, in this truly miraculous manner, he had ſhed upon them. And that this was a full and convincing demonſtration, that God had made that ſame Jeſus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Chriſt. The effect of this diſcourſe of Peter, in addition to what they had before ſeen and heard, is mentioned in the text, and in the following verſes. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and ſaid unto Peter, and to the reſt of the apoſtles, Men and brethren, what ſhall we do? Then Peter ſaid unto

them,

them, Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, for the remiſſion of ſins, and ye ſhall receive the gift of the Holy Ghoſt. For the promiſe is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God ſhall call. And with many other words did he teſtify, and exhort, ſaying, Save yourſelves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word, were baptized; and, the ſame day, there were added unto them about three thouſand ſouls." In theſe verſes we have the happy effect of the outpouring of the Divine Spirit upon the hearers, as before we had upon the preachers of the goſpel. "We have here, as one obſerves, the firſt fruits of that large harveſt of ſouls, which, by the goſpel, were gathered in to Jeſus Chriſt. Come and ſee, in theſe verſes, the exalted Redeemer, riding forth in theſe chariots of ſalvation, conquering and to conquer." But what we propoſe more particularly to attend to, in this diſcourſe, is this ſentence, "They were pricked in their heart." That is, their conſciences were awakened to a ſenſe of their ſin and guilt. They ſaw themſelves condemned, and in danger of everlaſting miſery. They felt an inward pain and diſtreſs, as poignant as if a ſword had pierced them to the heart. When divine truth comes home to the conſcience, and men are made to feel the power and efficacy of it, they muſt be pricked and pained in the heart, unleſs, at the ſame time, the heart is reconciled to the truth,

truth, and bowed in humble ſubmiſſion to it. Hence the words will naturally ſuggeſt to us this important and affecting obſervation :

That divine truth is painful to a corrupt and wicked heart ; and the more the truth is realized by ſuch a heart, the more uneaſy will it be.

I ſhall now endeavor,

I. To illuſtrate and confirm the truth of this obſervation, or ſhew, that divine truth is painful to a corrupt and wicked heart.

II. Endeavor to ſhew why it is ſo.

I. I ſhall attempt to eſtabliſh the truth of the obſervation, and ſhew that divine truth is painful to a corrupt and wicked heart ; and that the more the truth is realized by ſuch a heart, the more uneaſy it will be.

Here it will be neceſſary, firſt of all, to remark, that when we ſay, that divine truth is painful to a wicked heart, we do not mean that every wicked heart is always pained at reading, or hearing, or meditating on divine truth : We do not mean, that divine truth can never be repreſented, without giving pain and uneaſineſs to the corrupt and wicked heart. For experience proves the contrary. Probably, the experience of every one preſent has proved the contrary. Nor is it meant, that no one truth can be delivered, without giving pain to the wicked heart. Experience proves, that wicked men, in general, are not pained with divine truth. They can, for the moſt part, read

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and hear the moſt plain, important, and fundamental truths of the Bible, without feeling any great uneaſineſs, any conſiderable pain, anxiety, or diſtreſs. The reaſon of this is, The truth is not ſeen, realized, or felt, by ſuch perſons. It is not apprehended in its reality and importance. By far the greater part of wicked men are in a kind of ſtupid and unfeeling ſtate, with reſpect to divine and eternal truth. They have eyes, but they ſee not the light of truth, which ſhines around them. They have ears, but they hear not the voice of God, ſpeaking to them in his word. Hearts have they, but they underſtand not divine things. In them is fulfilled the ſaying of St. John: "The light ſhineth in darkneſs, and the darkneſs comprehendeth it not." This is the reaſon of the quietude and ſecurity of a wicked world. This is the reaſon why wicked men cry, Peace, peace, to themſelves, while God ſaith, "There is no peace to the wicked." But notwithſtanding this, it may be true, that divine truth is painful to a corrupt and wicked heart. When the truth is apprehended, realized, and felt, by the corrupt and wicked heart, it undoubtedly is ſo. And the more the truth is realized and felt by the wicked heart, the greater will its pain and uneaſineſs be. When the great and important truths of God's word come home to the conſciences of wicked men, and they ſee them in their reality and importance, when they feel the weight of truth, it is a burthen too heavy for them to bear. They are

then

then pained and pricked in the heart; and, with thoſe in our text, cry out, What ſhall we do? It is the truth of God's word, applied to the heart, that awakens and alarms the guilty ſinner; that fills him with the moſt painful apprehenſions, and gives him no true peace or reſt, until he can either ſhut out the light of truth from his heart, and return to his former ignorance and blindneſs, or his heart be renewed and changed, and he become cordially reconciled to the truth, and receive it in the love of it. That divine truth is painful to a corrupt heart, and that the more ſuch a heart realizes and feels it, the greater its pain and uneaſineſs will be, is clearly evident, from ſcripture declaration, and from hiſtory. Chriſt ſays, "Every one that doth evil hateth the light," *i. e.* the light of divine truth, "neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved." What light is to the natural world, or to the bodily eye, that truth is to the moral world, or to the eye of the underſtanding. Truth diſcovers things to the underſtanding, as they really are, and opens to the view of the ſinner ſuch a ſcene as gives him pain and uneaſineſs. His deeds are reproved. He is convinced of ſin. He is condemned by his own conſcience, and he finds that he is condemned by that God, who is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things. Hence, he is oppoſed to the light of truth, and endeavors to keep it out of ſight. That this is indeed the caſe, is confirmed by the whole tenor of

ſcripture

ſcripture hiſtory. Any one, who reads the Bible with attention, will find, that a wicked world has ever been oppoſed to divine truth, and in proportion as wicked men have ſeen, realized, and felt the truth, have they been pained and diſguſted by it. Many have at leaſt affected to treat the great and important truths of God's word with ſcorn and contempt. They have made a jeſt of ſacred things. But there is at leaſt reaſon to believe, that the great cauſe of this is, finding and feeling that the great truths of God's word, if they be indeed truths, are too painful for them to bear. Hence they wiſh to make themſelves believe that they are not truths. It is certain, from their own declaration, that ſome of the greateſt infidels were, antecedent to their infidelity, in ſome ſenſe believers in divine Revelation, and had been awakened, alarmed, and pained with the great truths of revealed religion. And is it not probable, that they flew to infidelity, in order to avoid the pain, which they felt from the truth, and which they knew not how to bear? But however this may be, it is clearly evident, that truth has been painful to many a wicked heart. If we look into the word of God, we ſhall find this to be the caſe, in many particular inſtances. In a variety of caſes, wicked men have diſcovered their pain and uneaſineſs with divine truth, by their paſſionate, angry and malicious conduct, towards thoſe who ſet divine truth before them. Ahab hated Elijah, becauſe he was faith-

ful in ſetting divine truth before him. He called him his enemy, and treated him as his enemy. He ſought to put him to death. And the only reaſon was, he could not bear the truth, which Elijah delivered to him. It pained and diſguſted his wicked heart. Elijah condemned his wicked conduct. So the ſame Ahab ſaid of Micaiah, a faithful prophet, "I hate him, for he doth not prophecy good concerning me, but evil." It is ſaid of the Jews, as a people, in the days of the prophets or ſeers, that "they ſaid unto the ſeers, See not, and to the prophets, Propheſy not; propheſy not unto us right things, propheſy unto us ſmooth things, propheſy deceits." They could not bear right things, that is, the truth. They wanted ſmooth things; things which would give no pain or uneaſineſs to their wicked heart; which would not diſturb them in their ſinful ſlumbers. And the prophets, in general, complied with their wiſhes. And God ſays, that they propheſied lies in his name. If we look to the New Teſtament, the truth of our obſervation, that divine truth is painful to the corrupt heart, and that the more clearly it is ſeen, the more offenſive it is, will appear with additional evidence. When John the Baptiſt preached the truth before Herod, it exaſperated and provoked him ſo much, that he took him, and ſhut him up in priſon, and finally put him to death. But nothing ever gave ſo much pain and uneaſineſs to the wicked heart, as the plain and faithful preaching of

Chriſt.

Chriſt. No man ever taught the way of life ſo clearly as he did. Never man ſpake the truth like this man. He ſpake as one who had authority. His words took hold of the heart and conſciences of wicked men, and they ſo far ſaw and felt the truth, as to find that it evidently condemned them. They conſidered themſelves as reproached by him. Hence they were exceedingly enraged and provoked. They ſaid all manner of evil concerning him. They treated him with every kind of indignity, inſult, and abuſe, and at laſt put him to the moſt ignominious and painful death. And all this they did, becauſe he told them the truth, becauſe he was plain and faithful in ſetting the truth before them. And the ſame was the cauſe of the perſecutions and ſufferings of the apoſtles. It was their plainneſs and fidelity, in preaching the truth, which pained the hearts, and provoked the reſentments, of wicked men. A moſt affecting inſtance of this kind we have recorded in the viith chapter of the Acts, where we find Stephen preaching a moſt ſolemn and affecting ſermon, delivering the moſt ſolemn and weighty truths, in the moſt engaging manner. We are told the effect it had. "When they heard theſe things, they were cut to the heart, and gnaſhed on him with their teeth. They cried out with a loud voice, and ſtopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and caſt him out of the city, and ſtoned him to death." But divine truth does not

always have this effect upon the hearts of wicked men, who are pained by it. It does not always exaſperate and provoke ſo highly. It does not always awaken the wrath and indignation of thoſe, who feel the power of it. It ſometimes carries ſuch conviction to the conſcience, as that ſinners cannot but know and feel that it is indeed the truth; and then, inſtead of being ſo highly exaſperated, they are greatly diſtreſſed and concerned, and, like thoſe in the text, they cry out, What ſhall we do? In this way, God is pleaſed, not only to diſcover what is truth, with reſpect to himſelf, and what is the truth with reſpect to them, but, many times, he is pleaſed to overcome the oppoſition of their heart, by renewing and changing it, and bringing them to receive and embrace the truth in the love of it. We proceed,

II. To ſhew why it is that divine truth is painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, and why the more clearly the truth is ſeen and felt, by ſuch a heart, the more uneaſy it is. We have endeavored to make it evident, that this is the caſe; and that it is indeed ſo will farther appear from conſidering the reaſon of it. Here, then, we ſay,

1. Divine truth is directly oppoſed to all ſin. Hence it muſt give pain and uneaſineſs to a corrupt and wicked heart. It is abſolutely impoſſible, that a heart, under the power and dominion of ſin, and in love with it, as every corrupt and wicked heart is, ſhould ever love and approve di-

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vine truth. On the contrary, the heart that loves ſin muſt be oppoſed to the truth. For the truth condemns ſin. Hence, Chriſt ſays, "Every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved." And hence, alſo, he ſaid, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men have loved darkneſs, rather than light; becauſe their deeds are evil." Men do not always feel the oppoſition of their heart to the light of truth, becauſe they do not always ſee the light of truth. The light ſhineth in darkneſs, and the darkneſs comprehendeth it not. When the truth is really apprehended, ſeen, and felt, it will then be ſeen that it is oppoſed to all ſin, and ſo oppoſed to the feelings of a corrupt heart.

2. Divine truth is painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, becauſe, as it condemns ſuch a heart, it ſhews the ſinner, that he is expoſed to the wrath and curſe of God. Truth, when it is ſeen, realized, and felt to be truth, by a corrupt and wicked heart, ſhews the ſinner what a being God is; how much he is oppoſed to all ſin; how plainly and awfully he condemns him. Truth, at the ſame time, ſhews him, that he is a ſinner. It ſhews him the plague of his own heart. It diſcovers to him, not only that he is a ſinner, but that he is wholly under the power and dominion of ſin. Truth teaches him, that he has a carnal heart, enmity againſt God, not ſubject to his law, neither indeed can be,

while it remains carnal. Divine truth discovers to him, the nature, extent, and spirituality, of the law of God; that it reaches the heart, and all the secret and hidden springs and inclinations of it. Truth, at the same time, arraigns the sinner, before the bar of conscience, a tribunal erected by the Deity in every human breast, and there accuses him of ten thousand crimes; proves him to be verily and greatly guilty; and, at the same time, strips him of all his excuses, leaves him self condemned, and shews him that the wrath of an angry and omnipotent God abideth on him, while he continues in an impenitent and unrenewed state. In proportion as divine truth is realized and felt by the sinner, these things are felt to be true, and these truths must be painful to the heart. It is impossible that the heart should see and realize its own character, and know itself to be in a state of condemnation, under the wrath and curse of God, and yet not be pained and uneasy. When the truth comes home to the conscience, and the sinner feels it, he must and will be pricked, and pained in the heart; he must be in great distress. No sinner can be quiet and easy, while he feels himself condemned, while he sees and knows, that he is under the curse of a broken law, and that he is liable every moment to drop into endless misery. And divine truth, realized and felt by the sinner, will convince him, that this is his situation, and this will be painful to him. These truths are all opposed to the feelings of a

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wicked heart. The unrenewed heart, in view of theſe truths, is diſpoſed to quarrel and contend with God, and to ſay, that the way of the Lord is not equal. The ſinner quarrels and contends with the law and government of God, and finds no peace. I add,

3. Divine truth is painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, becauſe it tends to exalt and magnify God, and to humble and abaſe the ſinner very deeply. Truth evinces and illuſtrates the moral rectitude and unlimited glory of God, the rectitude of his government and law, the grandeur of his works, the ſupremacy and abſolute ſovereignty in which he moves at the head of the whole moral ſyſtem, the irreſiſtibleneſs of his power, and the infinite obligations all creatures are under to obey and honor him, with all the heart. It, therefore, exhibits him, to all creatures, and even to the conſcience of the ſinner, as an infinitely glorious being. Truth, with equal force of demonſtration, ſhews the ſinner how hateful, vile, and guilty he is before God, ſhows him his dependence, his accountableneſs, and his incapability of eſcaping out of the hands of the holy God, who is a ſovereign God, who has a right to do as he will with his own, and who will ſave or deſtroy juſt as he pleaſes. Truth, therefore, infinitely honors the Being, whom the ſinner oppoſes moſt; and ſinks low, even into the depths of dependence, loathſomeneſs and danger,

the being whom he loves moſt, himſelf. This is perfectly galling to his pride, and painful to his heart. O how painful! It is too painful to be borne.

I obſerve, once more,

4. Divine truth is painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, becauſe it cuts off all ground of hope, on the ground on which the ſinner at preſent ſtands. Though it is a great and important truth, a faithful ſaying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jeſus Chriſt came into the world to ſave ſinners; yet, this gives no juſt ground of hope to the ſinner, whoſe heart is under the power and dominion of ſin, unrenewed and unſanctified. He is ſtill in the gall of bitterneſs and bond of iniquity. He is not in a better ſtate, becauſe a Savior is provided, ſo long as he continues to deſpiſe the Savior, and reject his offered grace. He is, indeed, the more aggravatedly guilty; his condemnation the more juſt; and his miſery will be the more intolerable, if he continue in his preſent ſtate. Truth, therefore, gives the impenitent ſinner no kind of encouragement to hope, that he ſhall eſcape the wrath and curſe of God, while he continues in his preſent ſtate. On the contrary, it cuts off all hope of ſafety, and leaves him wholly in the hand of a ſovereign God, who can do with him as he pleaſes, and who has mercy, on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Divine truth, therefore, muſt be painful to the

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wicked heart; and the only reaſon why all wicked men are not pained in the heart with the truth, muſt be, either becauſe they do not believe the truth, or becauſe they do not ſee and feel it.

SERMON

SERMON XXIV.

Truth Painful to a Wicked Heart.

ACTS, ii. 37.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and ſaid unto Peter, and to the reſt of the apoſtles, Men and brethren, what ſhall we do?

SOLOMON ſays, "The ſpirit of a man will ſuſtain his infirmity; but a wounded ſpirit, who can bear?" By which he undoubtedly intends, that man can, by the ſtrength of merely animal ſpirits, fortitude, and reſolution, bear the infirmities or burdens of this life; but when the heart is wounded, when the ſoul is pierced with the arrows of deep conviction, and divine truth comes home to the heart, this would be intolerable, was there no relief to be had. There is nothing wounds and pains the heart, like divine truth. Nothing gives ſo much uneaſineſs and diſtreſs to a heart unreconciled to God, as plain, important truth, ſeen, realized, and felt, by the wicked heart. The power of truth is great, and it will finally prevail,

vail, to the joy and comfort of all the friends of God, and to the confuſion and miſery of all his enemies. Truth is the great weapon, which God makes uſe of, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to ſupport and eſtabliſh his throne and government, and to confound, diſappoint, and ſubdue his enemies. His cauſe is the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs. And he makes uſe of nothing but truth to ſupport it. Truth is mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the ſtrong holds of ſin and Satan, caſting down imaginations, and every high thing, which exalteth itſelf againſt the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Chriſt. Sinners make lies their refuge, and hide themſelves under falſehood. Truth ſweeps away the refuge of lies, and deſtroys the falſehood under which they attempt to hide. But, in doing this, it gives great pain to thoſe, who have been reſting in falſehood, and ſeeking eaſe under a covert of lies. Truth, when it comes home to the heart, and is realized and felt by the ſinner, pierces him through with ſorrow, and makes him cry out, in anguiſh and diſtreſs, "What ſhall I do?"

Divine truth is painful to a corrupt and wicked heart; and the more truth is realized and felt by ſuch a heart, the more uneaſy it will be. This was the doctrinal obſervation drawn from the text, and diſcuſſed in the preceding diſcourſe. It was endeavored to be illuſtrated, and confirmed, and ſome reaſons were given why it is ſo. What remains

mains is by way of improvement, in ſome inferences and reflections, ariſing from the ſubject.

I. If divine truth be painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, then it is no evidence that a doctrine is not true, that wicked men find fault, quarrel, and contend with it. It is clearly evident, that wicked men often have, and do, quarrel, and contend with the truth, and with thoſe who ſet the truth plainly before them. We have found, that this has been the caſe in every age. It was ſo in the days of the Old Teſtament prophets; and it was ſo in the days of Chriſt. No one, who believes the divine authority of the ſcriptures, and who acknowledges that Chriſt was a teacher, ſent from God, can queſtion, whether Chriſt preached and taught the truth, nor whether he preached it in the moſt plain and intelligible manner. It is evident, that he did; and, that his hearers often ſaw and felt the power of it. It was this that offended and enraged them to ſuch a degree, that they put him to the moſt painful and ignominious death. And in every age ſince, there have been many who have hated, quarrelled, and found fault with the plain and faithful preachers of the truth. So that it cannot poſſibly be any evidence, that any doctrines are not true, that many men find fault, quarrel, and contend with ſuch doctrines, and with thoſe who deliver them. Nor is it a certain evidence, that they are not true, that they do not contend with them. For many do

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not always see and feel the power of truth. There are many men, who quarrel and contend with the truth, who yet do not do it openly. Many contend with the truth, who yet dare not complain and contend with the preachers of it. They are, in heart, greatly uneasy, but yet dare not openly complain. Indeed, if divine truth be painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, then a corrupt and wicked heart will always be uneasy with divine truth, when it really and truly sees and feels it. The corrupt heart cannot relish, or love, but must be opposed to divine truth. Hence, wicked men often find fault and contend with the truth. They cannot bear to think that the plain declarations of scripture are true. They wish and endeavor to find some way to evade the truth, either to disbelieve it, or think it not applicable to themselves. How many are there, who hate to hear those doctrines, which show the total depravity and wickedness of the human heart; which represent the sinner as dead in trespasses and sins, and an enemy to the real character of God! How many, who cannot bear to hear of the sovereignty of God, and of his doing all things after the counsel of his own will! Such doctrines disturb the peace and quietude of sinners, and their hearts will rise up against them, if they have any sense of the truth of them. Hence it is no evidence whatever, against the truth of any doctrine, that many men cannot bear to hear it, but do really quarrel and contend with it.

2. If

2. If divine truth be painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, then we learn, that wicked men are peculiarly expoſed to embrace error; and why it is that there are ſo many errors among mankind. That the hearts of all men are naturally corrupt and ſinful, is a truth too evident to need any labored proof; and that truth is painful to ſuch a heart, is, we think, alſo evident. Hence it is, that mankind are peculiarly expoſed to reject the truth, and embrace error. Men naturally wiſh to avoid, or get rid of that, which gives them pain. This is equally true of mental, as of bodily pain. Yea, as mental pain is often much greater, and more intolerable, than bodily, we are more deſirous of getting rid of it, than of that, which pertains to the body. Hence it is, that the world of mankind in general are deſirous of remaining in a ſtate of ſinful quietude and ſecurity. They do not love to be diſturbed in their ſinful ſlumbers. They chooſe to keep off convictions of their loſt, undone, and periſhing condition. They refuſe to come to the light, leſt their deeds ſhould be reproved, and they find themſelves condemned. For this reaſon, when divine truth begins to come home to the conſcience, and ſinners begin to be alarmed, and, like Felix of old, to tremble under the awful apprehenſions of a judgment to come; like him, they ſay to their fears and convictions, "Go thy way for this time." They endeavor to perſuade themſelves, that there is time enough yet; that there is no need

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of being in any hurry. And if this plea does not quiet their fears, and ſtifle their convictions, they have recourſe to ſome other method. And the moſt common of all methods is, to hide the truth from the view of the mind, to perſuade themſelves, that their character is not ſo bad, and that their danger is not ſo great, as has been repreſented; that God is not ſo ſtrict and ſevere as they have been ready to imagine; that he is more pitiful and compaſſionate, more kind and benevolent, than to puniſh them forever for their ſins. Any thing that will give them a hope of peace and ſafety, is very readily embraced and believed; and the enemy of ſouls always ſtands ready to ſay to them, "Thou ſhalt not ſurely die." When the mind is in this ſituation, the heart oppoſed to the real truth of God's word, and yet ſeeking for ſomething to quiet and calm its fears, how much expoſed is it to embrace any error, which ſpeaks peace unto it! Truth will not afford peace, while the heart is unrenewed. It was truth which wrought conviction. It was truth, which occaſioned the pain and diſtreſs. And truth will continue and increaſe the conviction, and pain, until the heart be overcome, and be brought to receive the truth in the love of it. Hence it is, that God ſays, that "there is no peace to the wicked;" that "the wicked are like the troubled ſea, which cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt." In this ſituation, either the heart muſt bow to the truth, and give up its

controverſy,

controverſy, by an unfeigned and unconditional ſurrendery to God, or it muſt make lies its refuge, and hide itſelf under falſehood, in order to avoid its diſtreſs. Hence, men, under ſtrong convictions of conſcience, are exceedingly prone to lay hold on that, which will promiſe them ſafety, though they are unreconciled to God. Error is the only thing, which has a flattering appearance. It will, therefore, be welcome. Hence it is, that there are ſo many errors among mankind; and that ſo many of mankind are led to embrace them. Truth gives pain to a corrupt and wicked heart, becauſe it is oppoſed to the feelings and happineſs of ſuch a heart. But error affords preſent relief. It ſeems to promiſe peace and ſafety to the ſinner. In this view, it appears not at all ſtrange, that there are ſo many, and ſuch various errors, even in a chriſtian land; and that men are ready to lay hold on any thing, rather than the plain and fundamental truths of the Bible. When a ſinner has been under great awakenings, and ſtrong convictions of conſcience, of his ſins, and danger, if he be not truly converted from ſin to God, he uſually falls into ſome groſs error. And many, becauſe they can get relief in no other way, have recourſe to infidelity, or, as is frequent in the preſent day, to Univerſaliſm. And ſome, who, for a long time, have entertained a hope of their good eſtate, afterwards finding reaſon to queſtion their ſafety on this ground, fly to the modern ſentiment of no puniſhment after this life.

And

And it becomes, afterward, truly painful to them to hear of the future and everlasting punishment, of the impenitent and ungodly.

3. If truth be painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, then we learn, that the heart must be renewed, and changed, before it can truly love and relish divine truth. To receive the truth in the love of it, is made a part of the christian character. The good man not only assents to the great and important truths of God's word, as being true, but he is said, in the word of God, to *receive the truth*; which expresses a cordial approbation of it. So he is said to love the truth, and to walk in the truth, and to rejoice in it. The good man has an high esteem of the truth. He values it above gold; yea, above much fine gold. It is sweeter than honey to his taste. He has taken it as his heritage forever. It is the rejoicing of his heart. But wicked men hate the truth, and will not come to it. They reject the counsel of God. They resist the light of truth, and shut their eyes against it. Hence, it is necessary, that the heart be renewed and changed, before it can ever receive the truth, in a spiritual and saving manner. Many wicked men, however, can very well bear to hear truth delivered, because they do not understand it, or do not see and feel the nature and effects of it; or because they think that it does not apply to them. But the heart cannot love and rel-

iſh the truth, until it be renewed by the power and grace of God. Hence,

4. We learn, that the power and grace of God muſt be employed to change the heart. Means are, of themſelves, ineffectual. Means are, indeed, uſed; and the great mean made uſe of is the word of God, the word of truth. This is the rod of God's ſtrength, or his ſtrong rod, with which he ſubdues the heart of the ſinner, ſlays the enmity of his heart, and brings him to receive the truth in the love of it. But what can the word of truth do towards changing the heart, which is oppoſed to the truth? The more clearly the truth is ſet before the ſinner, and the more the wicked heart feels and realizes it, the more it oppoſes it. Hence, nothing ſhort of a divine power can change the heart, and cauſe it to receive the truth in the love of it. As divine truth is oppoſed to the feelings of a corrupt heart, it is abſolutely neceſſary, that the heart be ſubdued; that the ſinner be brought to give up all controverſy with God; that he may no longer diſpute and contend with him; that he may no longer complain, that the way of the Lord is not equal; but that he cheerfully own the juſtice and righteouſneſs of God, and his entire dependence on the free and ſovereign grace of God.

5. If divine truth be painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, and if the more ſuch a heart ſees and feels the truth, the more uneaſy it is, and the more it oppoſes it; then we learn the exceeding

ſinfulneſs,

ſinfulneſs, and aggravated criminality, of ſuch a heart. Certainly, it muſt be extremely criminal for a guilty ſinner to oppoſe, reſiſt, and contend with eternal truth and rectitude. To do this, is to contend with God, and to impeach his character and conduct. Truth is the eſſential baſis of God's throne, and the firſt principle of his government. It is the rule, by which he always acts. To contend with truth is, therefore, to contend with God. To hate the truth, is to hate God. To oppoſe the truth, is to oppoſe God. Truth is unchangeable in its nature, as God is: It is, therefore, amiable and excellent, as God is. How exceedingly vile and criminal it is, then, to reſiſt and oppoſe the truth! And how aggravatedly guilty are thoſe, who oppoſe and reſiſt the truth, in proportion as they ſee and feel, the reality and importance of it. This was what made the Jews, in Chriſt's day, ſo exceedingly guilty and criminal. Chriſt ſays, "If I had not come and ſpoken unto them, they had not had ſin; but now they have no cloke for their ſin:" *i. e.* If Chriſt had not come and ſpoken the truth to them, in the cleareſt and plaineſt manner poſſible, they would have been innocent, in compariſon with what they now were. Their ſin would have been comparatively ſmall. But now, when they had been taught the truth, when they had both ſeen and heard it, they had no kind of excuſe; they were aggravatedly guilty. And this is the condemnation of every impenitent ſinner.

Hence, Chriſt ſays, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil." And this ſhews the propriety and juſtneſs of Chriſt's pronouncing ſuch great and aggravated woes, upon thoſe places, in which moſt of his mighty works were done. They ſinned againſt greater light, againſt ſtronger convictions, againſt more plain and obvious truth. And this ſhows why ſinners, under the goſpel, ſhould meet with more aggravated condemnation, than thoſe, who live in heathen lands.

6. If divine truth be painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, then it muſt be a hard and ſelf denying duty to a miniſter, to preach thoſe truths, which will give pain and offence to many of his hearers.

Plain and faithful preaching often gives offence, and expoſes the preacher, to reproach, to contempt, and, ſometimes, to violent perſecution and death: As was the caſe with Chriſt, and his followers, and many of the prophets before them, and many of his faithful miniſters ſince. And this affords a ſtrong temptation to miniſters, to preach ſmooth, ſoft and eaſy things, which will not give offence. This may account for the exiſtence of ſo much preaching, of that kind, at the preſent day. The temptation is ſtrong to preach the truth, if indeed it be preached, in ſuch a manner as not to wound or hurt the feelings of the hearers. It muſt require

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a good degree of ſelf denial to deliver, plainly, the truth, when there is reaſon to believe that it will give offence. But this the faithful miniſter will do. This Chriſt did. And this his followers did, not counting their lives dear to them, in ſuch a cauſe as they were engaged in. But though there be no great cauſe to fear giving general offence, by plain and faithful preaching, yet every miniſter muſt know, that the truth will give uneaſineſs to many of his hearers, if they realize and feel it. And this he muſt deſire, *i. e.* that they may feel the truth; that it may come home to the hearts of his hearers, and diſturb their ſinful quietude. In itſelf conſidered, it is not deſirable to give pain to any heart. But as it is neceſſary to the attainment of true peace, it is pleaſing to a benevolent mind, to ſee men pricked in the heart, and crying out, in anguiſh, "What ſhall we do?" Every wiſe and good miniſter wiſhes to preach, not barely to the ears, but to the heart, and to the conſciences, of his hearers. He wiſhes to make them ſee and feel the truth, however painful it may be to them. He knows, that unleſs what he delivers reaches the hearts of his hearers, it will do them no good. It will be only as water ſpilt upon the ground, that cannot be gathered up. Good men are not profited by the word preached, unleſs it reach their heart. Then it will comfort, quicken, and animate them. Wicked men are not profited, unleſs they ſee and feel the truth, and are pained by it. The

and good miniſter, therefore, will wiſh to reach the hearts of his hearers, however diſpleaſed or offended they may be with him for it. This was what made Chriſt ſuch an excellent preacher. It was, that all his diſcourſes were calculated to reach the heart. "Chriſt never drew a bow at a venture, but always directed the arrows of truth at the hearts of his hearers. He deſcribed the character of the ſaint, and the character of the ſinner, with ſo much truth and propriety, that every perſon might eaſily diſtinguiſh the one from the other, and know which belonged to himſelf. Nay, he did more than this. For he directed every man's eyes inward, and obliged him, by the light of truth, to ſee and feel his own character. This is that peculiar excellency in preaching, for which the fineſt encomium, perhaps, ever beſtowed on a preacher, was given by Lewis XIV, to the eloquent Biſhop of Clermont, Father Maſſillon. After hearing him preach at Verſailles, he ſaid to him, "Father, I have heard many great orators in this chapel. I have been highly pleaſed with them. But for you, whenever I hear you, I go away diſpleaſed with myſelf; for I ſee more of my own character."* Would ſuch a preacher, my hearers, be pleaſing to you? Would to God I could deſerve ſuch a character, however painful it might be to you.

7. If divine truth be painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, and if the more the truth be realized and

* See Emmons's Sermon, on "Chriſt the Standard of Preaching."

and felt, the more uneasy and distressed such a heart will be, then how dreadful and intolerable will hell be to the wicked! In that world of misery, truth will not only be known, but it will be seen, and understood, and felt, to the utter confusion and torment of the wicked. In the present state, wicked men are greatly ignorant of divine truth. The God of this world hath blinded their eyes, so that they cannot see the light of truth. But, in the state of final punishment, sinners will be fully and perfectly acquainted with all truth. They will then know what a being God is. They will then know, that he is a sovereign God, who hath, from eternity, concerted his plan, and in every age of time, performed every thing according to the counsel of his own will. In the world to come, truth will be stripped of all disguise. It will appear to be what it is. There will then be no more uncertainty what truth is. There will be no more difference in sentiment and opinion, as to what is truth. But all will see the truth clearly, understand it perfectly, and feel it most sensibly. The friends of God, whose hearts are reconciled to him, and who have received the truth in the love of it, will forever rejoice in the truth, and walk in the light of it; and the more they see and know of it, the greater their joy will be. But the enemies of God, whose hearts are opposed to the truth, will feel their pain and torment increased, by the clear discovery of it. They will not then be able to get

rid of truth. All their refuges of lies will then be deſtroyed. There will be no hiding place, no way for the wicked to deceive themſelves. Nothing will remain to divert the mind from attending to the truth. But every thing will ſerve to preſent the truth in the cleareſt poſſible manner. In this world, the wicked have many ways to ſhut out the light, and prevent the truth from taking hold of their conſciences. But there they muſt ſee, and hear, and know, and feel the truth. There they cannot run away from the truth. They cannot there avoid knowing it, as here they can. Though they will then hate the truth, far more than now they can do, yet they will not be able to avoid it. What an inconceivable ſource of pain and miſery will it be, to find and feel the truth to be, what they hate, and to know that they always oppoſed and reſiſted it. Now ſinners hate to hear ſome of the moſt plain and important truths, becauſe ſuch truths diſcover to them their own wickedneſs, which they are unwilling to ſee. But then, God will make them to hear, and ſee, and feel, the truth. Truth will then appear clear and bright as the ſun-beams; and like the heat of the ſun will then burn and conſume the wicked, and they ſhall be forever pained with it.

8. If divine truth be thus painful to a corrupt and wicked heart, then, of how great importance it is, that we all become friendly to the truth, willing to know the truth, and that we receive it in the

love

love of it. It is certainly the height of madneſs and folly, for any one to be unwilling to know and believe the truth; eſpecially as it relates to God, and the things of eternity. For the knowledge of the truth is of infinite importance. Men muſt and will, ſooner or later, know it. God is determined to make his truth known. He has taken many ways, and made uſe of various means, to exhibit divine truth. He has revealed it in his word, and men might and would ſee and know it, if they were willing to come to the light. And all God's works of nature, providence, and grace, are calculated to make God known, and to manifeſt the truth. And he will not finally fail of accompliſhing his end. It is certainly a very deſirable thing to know the truth, if it may be. And men do deſire, in every inſtance, to know what is true, except in the infinitely important things of religion. Here they are unwilling to come to the light, and know the truth, becauſe it gives them pain. But if it does, is it not better to endure pain in this life, than forever to feel it in the life to come? Is it not better to know and embrace the truth now, than to know and hate it forever in a world of miſery. Whatever the truth may be, the heart muſt love it, and embrace it, or it cannot be happy. God has eſtabliſhed his throne in truth and righteouſneſs, and it ſhall ſtand forever; and none, but the friends of truth, are, or can be, the friends of God. It is, therefore, of infinite importance, that we become

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cordially reconciled to the truth, and that we receive it in the love of it. It is of as much importance, as it is that we be ſaved. For we cannot be ſaved, without the knowledge and love of the truth. For, ſays Chriſt, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt, whom thou has ſent." To know them, is to know them practically. This knowledge involves, not only the aſſent of the underſtanding, but the conſent of the heart. To love the truth, and be willing to receive and embrace it, is the exerciſe of a renewed heart. This is what Chriſt calls coming to the light. And men's hating the light is expreſſive of the oppoſition of their heart to the truth. But this oppoſition of heart to the truth muſt be removed. Then the ſoul will love the word of God, will delight in it, as true, and love it, becauſe it is precious and important truth. And then the heart will not only be reconciled to ſome truths, but to all truth. It will then rejoice in the univerſal dominion and government of God. It will then be entirely ſwallowed up in the divine will. There are many things, taught in the word of God, which many men do not believe, ſuch as the doctrine of the divine decrees, the abſolute and univerſal ſovereignty of God, that he doeth all things after the counſel of his own will. But it would be well for ſuch as diſbelieve theſe doctrines, to aſk their own hearts, whether the only reaſon why they do not believe them, is not, becauſe

they

they are unwilling they ſhould be true; that they are unwilling that God ſhould be a ſovereign, doing juſt as he pleaſes; and whether, in this, they are not in heart oppoſed to God, and unwilling that he ſhould be God, and have the throne to himſelf. If ſo, does not this manifeſt a heart unreconciled to God?

O my hearers, the day, the awful day, is juſt at hand, when we ſhall all know what is truth; and if our hearts are reconciled to the truth, we ſhall be forever happy. But if, in heart, we are oppoſed to the truth, we muſt be unſpeakably miſerable. For the truth is great, and it will prevail.

AMEN.

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